Everybody's

NUMBER ONE JANUARY, 1925 VOLUME FIFTY-TWO

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

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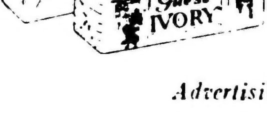

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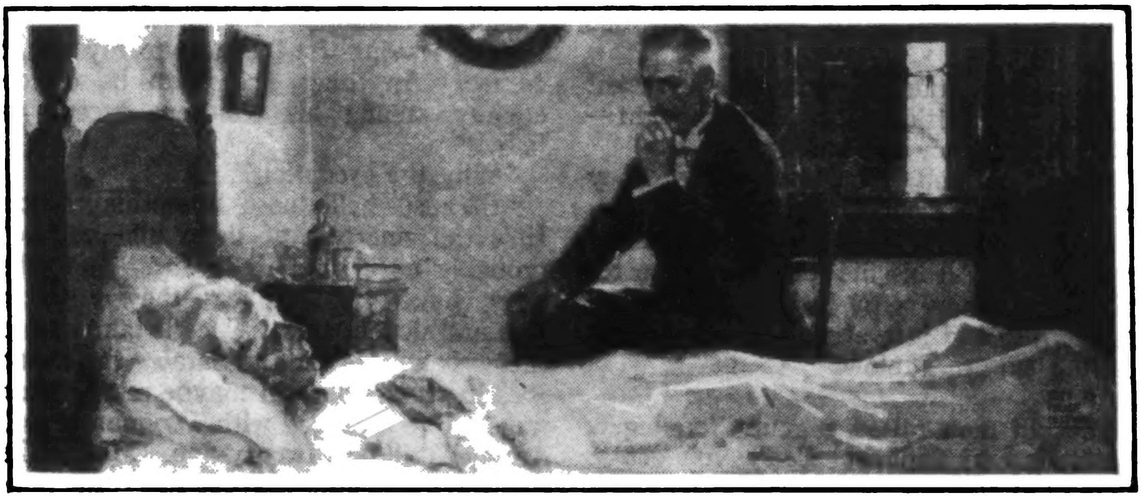
VOL. 52, NO. 1 JANUARY, 1925 SEWELL HAGGARD, EDITOR



A New Novel by the Author of "Trodden Gold"

The Phantom Caravan

Introducing an Embarrassing Young Man Who Shocks All His Family by Seeing the Funny Side of Things They Hold Sacred

By Howard Vincent O'Brien

Illustrations by Ralph Pallen Coleman

> *A moment's Halt—a momentary taste*
> *Of Being from the Well amid the Waste—*
> *And lo!—the phantom Caravan has reach'd*
> *The Nothing it set out from— Oh, make haste!*
> —THE RUBÁIYÁT.

"PULL up those shades, can't you?" grumbled the old man. "Isn't dying a gloomy enough business by itself?"

"You're supposed to be sleeping, Ammiel."

Ammiel Spottswood chuckled. "I've always done the wrong thing. That's why I made such a hash of life."

"Hash?" Dr. Taplow raised his eyebrows.

The old man tossed irritably. "You're an ass, at times, Taplow. I suppose you think that when I reach the pearly gates they'll bring out the band."

"They might do worse." The physician made a pretense of examining the bottles on the little medicine table. Ammiel Spottswood was an old friend and a dear one. He turned presently, his features again under control. "You're doing a lot of unnecessary worrying this afternoon."

The old man shook his head. "I'll be moving shortly." He made a significant gesture toward the figure outlined under the sheets. "It's a shabby abode at best. I'll be glad to go. But I'm troubled over the boy. They'll treat him like a murderer."

"Nonsense!"

"Don't contradict me. They'll put the curse of Cain on him. I can see it in their eyes."

"Why, he didn't mean to do it," frowned the physician.

"Nonsense, yourself! Of course he meant to do it! With malice aforethought—waited his chance and took it."

"But he's only four years old. They couldn't blame a child like that."

"Oho, couldn't they! You don't know my family. All his life long they'll be reminding him how he pushed his grandfather off the pier and into eternity. You've got to shut 'em up, Taplow."

"I?"

The old man raised a gaunt forefinger. "Confound it, Taplow! Can't you get it through your thick Scotch head they know nothing of my worn-out kidneys? When my clock stops ticking they'll lay it to that baby's prank. That won't do, I tell you. The child mustn't suffer for a coincidence of nature. I'd be where I am whether he pushed me into the ocean or no, wouldn't I, eh—wouldn't I?"

The physician slowly nodded.

"Well then!" A weak note of triumph came into the old man's voice. "See to it they don't pick on the child. If they do, why, damn me, I'll come back and rattle chains in the attic, that I will!"

"You're fond of the lad, aren't you!"

"I'm responsible for him. None of the others inherited my weaknesses. They're safe and sane Bremlings. He—poor chap—he's *me*, all over again. Likely to turn out just as badly, too."

"It's too bad about you!"

THE old man nodded complacently. "I might have been a great man, Taplow—if it hadn't been so easy for me to see the funny side of things. Why, when I went to Congress the first time, the party wiseacres swore I wouldn't be stopped short of the White House itself. But I *was* stopped. I stopped myself. The first speech I made did it. I made 'em laugh. Lord, how they did laugh over that silly speech! I can see 'em now. They rocked in their seats. The papers printed it—papers all over the country. I was ruined!"

"You're talking foolishly," said Dr. Taplow with blunt conviction.

The old man sighed. "All right, I'll talk sensibly, then. I've gone over my will again, Taplow. You're to be a co-executor with the bank. Any objections?"

"None, Ammiel."

"I'm leaving the business to my son, of course. Anything else is to be divided equally among his children—except the baby."

"Why the exception?"

"Because he'll need something extra. He's the smartest of them all—but he'll probably never use his brains. The other boys, Jonas and Stephen—they're serious lads and dependable. They'll take care of themselves. Hester and Sarah—their share goes in trust. They'll maybe marry scalawags. I've arranged with Twyman to hold Ammiel's till he's twenty-five. Meanwhile, his income will go to his parents. And now—I think I'd like a chat with the lad."

"You've chatted enough, Ammiel."

The old man raised an imperious hand. "You stop ordering me around, Taplow. Do as I say. Damn it, what's the sense of coddling a gone goose?"

The physician shrugged his shoulders and went out. He reappeared a moment later leading a dark-eyed little boy of four. The latter hung back, his lip quivering, a suggestion of tears under his long lashes.

The old man held out a bony hand. "Afraid, laddie? Of course you are. I represent what youth fears most—disease and old age. But it's only the body that's old and sick. *I'm* just as young as you are, laddie. Can't you understand that?"

There was a wistfulness in the tired voice that the child seemed to understand. Shyly, dropping the physician's hand, he came to the beside.

"Hello, gran'pa," he said hesitantly.

"Come closer, little friend. Touch my hand."

The child hesitated a moment, then obeyed the request.

"You see, Taplow—he has courage. The rare sort—that conquers fear. Haven't you, lad?"

Unsmiling, the boy nodded, as if he understood the question.

"There are many things," continued the old man after a momentary pause, "many, many things I'd like to say to you. But you wouldn't understand. And if you did, you wouldn't remember. You—oh, my boy, my boy, I wish that I might stay with you, and watch you, and perhaps help you a little! But providence isn't arranged that way. Each of us, strong or foolish, weak or wise, must grope his way alone through the darkness until he returns to the light from which he came. Well, good-by, little man." Tenderly, he stroked the child's curly head. "I do not think we will meet again—here. Good-by—good luck. You have a hard life ahead of you. Prescience, Taplow—ante-mortem prescience." Weakly, he fell back against the pillows. "Good-by, lad—flesh of my flesh. Talk like a damned patriarch, eh, Taplow?" The voice trailed away to a husky whisper.

There came a sound of subdued weeping from the hall beyond, and with a sudden access of strength, the old man raised himself again. "That you, Sophia, eh? Come here," he commanded sternly. And when his daughter-in-law stood by his bed, he continued, his eyes closed: "My goods and chattels are disposed of in writing, but I want you to understand that the bulk of my love is accorded your baby. You understand that, Sophia?"

"Yes, father."

"I don't think you understand at all," grumbled the old man feebly. "Well, no matter. Taplow understands. He'll be *in loco parentis*."

The room, somber at best with its dark hangings and the ponderous bedstead of black walnut, fell silent as Sophia Spottswood led her youngest boy away. He, also, had begun to cry a little, not knowing why.

The physician remained, his hand on his chin, looking at his friend. The latter's eyes were closed, his features relaxed, making him look younger than he was. It was a mobile face, with determination in the sharp-cut lips, but with faint lines around the eyes and mouth that bespoke a readiness for laughter.

The tired eyes opened for a moment. "They used to teach us that when a child is born, the fairies come with gifts. They gave that boy a doubtful gift, Taplow—a doubtful gift."

There was a pause, and the eyes, fluttering feebly, closed again. "I'm afraid they gave him a sense of humor. Poor lad! You must watch out for him."

There was another pause, longer than the first. Then he whispered, very faintly: "I think you can pull those shades now, Taplow. I'm tired."

AS AMMIEL grew it dawned slowly upon him that Fate, in making him a Spottswood, had somehow made an ironic jest. He was like a kitten in a litter of mastiffs.

His family puzzled him—a condition, he presently discovered, which was reciprocal. And so, more and more, he sought asylum in the garret, where, in the cobwebbed shelter of the rafters, and behind a parapet of trunks, he could recline on an old awning he had salvaged from the basement, and read, and dream upon the mystery of life.

His preference for this sanctuary, so dirty and so badly lighted, to the obvious decorum and comfort of the family circle, troubled his mother and deepened the mistrust of his brothers and sisters. But Ammiel merely smiled, the odd twisted, deprecating little smile so reminiscent of his grandfather, and declined to argue the matter with any of them. It was not that he thought himself right, and them wrong. He was merely inarticulate, and sometimes, in his solitude, he cried a little over it. No one suspected what a very lonely little boy he was.

THOUGH the suns of eighteen summers had their opportunity to ripen him in the ways of wisdom and righteousness, Ammiel continued to be, in his mother's phrase, "a good deal of a trial."

His father was less temperate. And at a letter which came one spring morning, Mr. Spottswood exploded.

"Damn!" he cried, his naturally florid face going purple. "What *are* we going to do with that boy?"

"Oh, dear! What now?" Sophia sank back in her chair as one expectant of a blow.

Her husband tossed her the letter with a gesture which seemed to disclaim further responsibility. "Why can't Potter run his school himself?"

"After all, it *is* our place to see that the child studies," suggested Sophia mildly. "W—"

"Nonsense! *I'm* not a schoolmaster—I'm a business man. And I'm late now. Damn!"

"I do wish you wouldn't swear so," said Sophia plaintively.

Her husband, fumbling in the clothes closet, growled an unintelligible reply. A moment later his voice rose. "Ammiel! *Ammiel!*"

From somewhere above came a faint reply.

"You'll have to hurry if you're going to catch that train," said Sophia gently.

Mr. Spottswood jammed his hat on the back of his head. "It's your fault not getting that boy up in the morning. You aren't strict enough—not half!"

Before she could answer, the front door had slammed behind him, and she could hear his heavy steps on the gravel walk.

"Ammiel!" she called sternly. "If you don't come down this minute you'll get no breakfast. I mean what I say!"

"Yes, mother," came a soft voice from the stairway, and Ammiel, still fumbling with a half-knotted necktie, came into the dining-room. He surveyed his mother inquiringly. "What's up?"

Sophia gave him a reproachful look. "Dr. Potter is complaining about you again."

"I knew he was going to," murmured Ammiel absently. "Old Pot's more full of beans than usual. How 'bout a little marmalade, mummie?"

"Your father was very upset. He's worried about you!"

Ammiel grinned. "*Worried?* It didn't sound like worry—exactly. Well, I see Bulgaria's going to clean up the Balkans. What are they fighting for, mummie?"

Mrs. Spottswood sighed helplessly. "Ammiel! Put away that paper. You'll be late for school."

When she had her household under way for the day, Mrs. Spottswood put on her hat and went to see Dr. Potter.

"We are so exercised about Ammiel," she began. "His—"

"I shall be frank, Mrs. Spottswood," he interrupted her. "The boy is not interested in his work. *I* cannot interest him. I have come, reluctantly, to the belief that *nobody* can interest him."

"But he's a bright boy," exclaimed Sophia, incredulously.

The schoolmaster sighed wearily. "That is the irony of it. Really, Mrs. Spottswood, it would appear that he did not want to enter college."

"But what *does* he want to do?"

"That," said Dr. Potter briefly, "is something I have not been able to discover."

Sophia rose. "He shall enter college," she said resolutely. "He must."

Determination was etched in the lines about her mouth as she made her way home. She was well aware, however, that she could not hope to handle her son alone. Her resolution would dash itself against his amiable apathy like waves against a rocky shore. She must have allies.

That evening, innocent of her plans, Ammiel came home to find the table set for a family conclave. With the intuition which was at once his blessing and his curse, he understood instantly what was in the wind, and he made a wry grimace at Elvirah, the maid.

"Family?" he inquired, with a glance toward the dining-room.

She nodded primly. "Mr. an' Mrs. Jonas, Mr. an' Mrs. Stephen, Miss Sarah, Mr. an' Mrs. Blanding—"

"Casper Jenkins Blanding," he corrected her gravely. "Hester's very particular about that, you know." Then he groaned. "Oh! Shall I get sick and take to my bed, Elvirah?"

Her reply was checked by the entrance of Mrs. Spottswood. "You'd better skip up and get ready for dinner, Ammiel," she said with a bright smile. "What kept you so late?"

"Playin' ball." A desperate idea occurred to him. "I—I think maybe I got a touch of sunstroke. It was awful hot. I—I don't feel much like dinner, somehow."

His mother's voice was sympathetic, but her purpose, plainly, was unaltered. "I'm sure you'll feel better, dear, if you have something to eat."

"The baby of the family," muttered Ammiel as he went slowly upstairs, "certainly gets it in the neck!"

HE WAS full of foreboding when he reappeared, but outwardly he was calm enough. "Greetings," he said with a bow to the company assembled on the porch. "Well, Jean—and how are all the nieces and nephews?" He made his entrance with this question because his being an uncle seemed in a way to establish him as an adult.

But Jean, the wife of Jonas, took the

question literally, and in her slow contralto began a detailed answer.

She was promptly interrupted by Hester, who had been the wife of Casper Blanding for two years, and had no children. "Where in the world did you get that tie, Ammie?"

Ammiel cast his eyes down. "What's the matter with it?"

His sister's lips were curved in disapproval. "Nothing—except that it's full of grease spots."

"Oh, let the kid alone!" broke in Stephen Spottswood. "If you had your way, Hester, you'd make him a reg'lar Lord Fauntleroy."

"Yes—you girls nag him to death," agreed Jonas, sitting somberly in one corner, his hands folded over an incipient corpulence. "Give him a chance."

Further discussion of Ammiel was halted by the appearance in the doorway of the head of the family. "Well, well, children—and here we all are again! Well, well!"

"You're late, my dear," said his wife.

"Well, we old fellows have to work. I was brought up on the theory that if a man didn't work he wasn't good for much. Nowadays—"

"Dinner is served," announced Elvirah from behind him, and the company experienced a sense of relief. They knew too well what followed when Mr. Spottswood began with that "nowadays."

AMMIEL was not in the least deceived by the varied conversation that lasted through the first part of the meal. When his mother presently steered a course into educational channels, and Jonas expressed a ponderous regret that *he* had not been to college, and Stephen gave an enthusiastic outline of what it meant to be the holder of an academic degree, he offered respectful attention and prepared himself for the inevitable progress from the general to the specific.

With the coffee, on the porch, the moment came. "I had a long talk with Dr. Potter this morning," said Sophia, addressing no one in particular. "He seemed to feel that Ammiel could not possibly pass the examinations, unless—"

"You'd better buck up, young fellow," exclaimed Jonas, in his rumbling bass.

"What are you weak in?" demanded Stephen briskly. "Or just too much baseball?"

"Or too much Phyllis Jerrold?" put in Hester.

"Puppy-love!" growled Mrs. Spottswood. "Boys nowadays—"

Ammiel produced a large and quite artificial yawn.

"Don't you *want* to go to college?" demanded his father, his natural color beginning to get the better of him.

"No," replied Ammiel simply.

"No?" roared his father. And "No?" echoed the others.

Ammiel shrank back in a gesture of defense. "I merely said I didn't want to go," he protested. "I didn't say I wanted *not* to go."

Jonas nodded. "You mean you don't care—one way or the other?"

Ammiel inclined his head.

"But my dear boy—you *must* go to college!" cried his mother.

"Of course," echoed Hester. "For social reasons if for no other."

"You'll ruin your life if you don't," declared Stephen solemnly.

The comment was like the rattle of musketry, and like the boom of a heavy cannon, his father's voice overwhelmed the rest with a final: "You're going whether you want to or not!"

Ammiel shrugged his shoulders. "Then what's all the fuss about?"

The question was so logical, and so difficult of answer, that for a moment there was complete silence. Then his mother resumed the attack. "You can't pass unless you brush up on your history."

"What kind of history?" asked Jonas, frowning severely.

"You wouldn't know if I told you," replied Ammiel, a trifle sulkily. Their badgering was getting too much for him.

"You needn't be rude," observed Sarah.

This was treachery. Being only two years older than himself, Ammiel had thought her more loyal. "It's Greek and Roman," he muttered, with a mournful glance at her.

"Well, study it up," snapped his father relentlessly. "If you don't, why—"

Ammiel surveyed the faces around him. He could not, of course, defend himself against them, for the cogent reason that he had no defense. He might struggle with proper valiance, but he knew by experience with what futility. "I—I'll pass the exams," he said suddenly.

"But—but—" they began in chorus, taken aback by his change of front.

"I'll cram the stuff," he explained. "I won't remember any of it afterward, of course—but that doesn't matter, does it?"

They were silent at this extraordinary statement, and before they could find voice, he had retreated to the doorway. "Guess I'll begin right away," he said. "G'night."

As he went up the stairs they heard him singing, in a throaty, unsteady tenor:

"I may be yellow an' covered with fleas
But my pants, thank the Lord, don't bag at the knees."

"That boy's no Spottswood," declared his father with profound conviction. "He—he's a Bremling!"

BY MEMORIZING the chief events in the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome, Ammiel entered college. Whereupon he resumed his normal acceptance of such beguilement as the place afforded.

"Life," he observed to his room-mate, Douglas Padgett, "is not unbeautiful."

Padgett stepped back to survey the galaxy of Harrison Fisher girls he was arranging above the mantel, and removed a mouthful of tacks. "Maybe not. But if you don't take it more seriously, you're going to get into a peck of trouble!"

"Oh!" groaned Ammiel. "That sounds like my family!"

Ammiel's college life proved to be one long series of collisions with that incredibly pitiless thing, undergraduate opinion.

"The world's an insane asylum," he wailed. "Everybody in it making other people do what they don't want to do."

"But, Ammie," began Padgett, "life—"

"Oh, I know! It's real, it's earnest—and all that. Tell me not in mournful numbers it's but an empty dream. And yet—what *else* is it? And why can't nuts like me be allowed to dream in peace? I ask you, Padge."

"Because," answered the faithful Padgett, "you'd get into too much trouble."

As the years passed, Ammiel ceased to struggle against the countless forces with which he found himself at outs. This, he decided, was merely age. He felt very old at twenty-one. In the language of the physics laboratory, his emotions were at absolute zero, where there was neither heat nor movement.

The one contradiction of this theorem was Phyllis Jerrold.

He had never analyzed his rather odd attachment for her. It had begun in childhood, persisted through propinquity and habit, and been approved, if not actually fostered, by both families. His mother felt that it constituted what she called a "steadying influence," and Peter Jerrold, who had come from obscurity to affluence by a somewhat devious route, was not displeased at the prospect of alliance with the Spottswoods.

When Phyllis came up to games, Ammiel was proud of the unconcealed envy of his friends. But at the same time he knew that the celibate isolation of college life enhanced the natural charm of furs and violets and soft cheeks under November winds.

Instinctively, he was mistrustful of Phyllis's fragile loveliness. It was, he felt, an inadequate foundation for the heavy superstructure of marriage. And so he was insistent upon the love in which soul speaks to soul. This, to her, was the profoundest flattery, setting him apart from other and more obtuse young men. And in return she gave him the confessional he craved.

Their engagement was to be announced after his graduation. But two things happened, which took his mind from what had become a rapidly deepening anxiety. One was the death of his father during the Christmas holidays.

"Curious—how few the consequences," he mused in her shocked ears. "Jo runs the business, and mother keeps on running the family. Father wasn't very important."

Her silence brought a quizzical little smile to Ammiel's lips. "You don't like to look life in the eye, do you, Phyl? Most people don't, I guess."

"I think I'm normal," answered Phyllis, a trifle stiffly.

"I'm not, of course," said Ammiel thoughtfully. "I wonder what it's like."

The second event—which was the country's declaration of war—brought many consequences, some of which Ammiel foresaw. He thought about it for weeks, and when he reached home in June, he had made a decision. "I hope you won't mind," he said to his mother, with a gentle diffidence. "But I—that is to say—"

She knew at once what was coming, and her face went pale. "The war?"

He inclined his head. "I expect it'll be uncomfortable. I never did like camping out. But it'll be more uncomfortable—being comfortable. You know what I mean, don't you?"

It was her turn to nod. "When the voice of duty speaks," she began, but her voice shook so that she could not go on.

He frowned. "It isn't *that*, mother. Gosh, you don't think I *want* to go?"

"Stephen has applied for a commission," she said, pride conquering her tears. "And Jonas—dear Jonas, busy as he is—is active in the Red Cross."

"I wonder if they're any keener about it than I am," murmured Ammiel pensively.

"It's a matter of duty," said his mother with profound conviction. Then her exaltation suddenly left her. "Oh, my boy, my baby boy!" she sobbed, putting her arms around him and hugging him close.

He patted her hand, understanding intuitively the anguishing conflict in her soul. "I know you don't want me to go. And you couldn't stand it if I didn't."

One of the consequences of his decision was a new attitude on the part of the family. Never had they treated him with such respect. Jonas, who had grown more silent with his added responsibilities, boomed approbation. Hester and Sarah spared him their sisterly critique of his manners, and showed unqualified pride. Stephen was perhaps the most enthusiastic.

"Lord," he exclaimed regretfully, "how I envy you! You'll be in the thick of it—and I'll have nothing but a desk job, probably, in Washington."

"They wanted him in the Judge Advocate's department," supplied his wife. "Being a lawyer, you know—"

"A family man can't pick and choose," sighed Stephen. "If I was your age—maybe I wouldn't be swinging a rifle! Why—"

"It's too bad," agreed Ammiel politely. "Only—rifles are pretty heavy. I've been practising with one. They take the skin off your shoulder."

"Of course you won't really carry a rifle," said Hester literally. "Officers—"

"When does the training-camp start?" broke in Stephen.

"Training-camp? Why, I don't know! I'm not going to a training-camp."

"Not going?" echoed Stephen incredulously.

"No. I'm enlisting."

"Enlisting?" rumbled Jonas.

"Yes. I understood they wanted men."

"Of course," expostulated Stephen. "But they need leaders, boy. Chaps like you—"

"*I* couldn't lead anybody! I—"

"You could learn," cried Hester.

Ammiel grinned. "I've had enough studying."

"But, Ammiel!" was the protesting chorus.

"I'm enlisting," he repeated, as he rose to leave them. "The artillery, I guess. When you get it, you get it all at once—not piece by piece, the way they do in the infantry."

PHYLLIS, he found, shared his family's chagrin.

"Ammie! You don't mean you're going to be just—just a—*private?*" she exclaimed when he told her.

He corrected her gravely. "I'm going to be a private."

"But, Ammie—"

Patiently, he explained the matter to her again.

"But privates—they're so rough. And they wear such *awful* costumes!"

"Uncle Sam pays for 'em—and they aren't costumes—they're uniforms."

"You'd be *so* handsome—with boots and everything," she wailed. Suddenly, with that genius for making the best of situations which is so peculiarly feminine, she broke into a radiant smile. "It's your democratic spirit, Ammiel dear. It's just like you. Oh, I think you're too wonderful!"

Ammiel frowned perplexedly. "Really, dear, I—"

She put a delicate forefinger on his lips. "You can't fool me, sweetheart. I know you. Of course you'll say that isn't it. But you never will admit how truly noble and big you are. You're always concealing your true nature and pretending to be less than you are. Oh, Ammie—I *adore* you!"

"But I never pretended anything in my life!" he protested. "That's half my trouble."

"Silly boy! Trying to fool his little Phyllis!"

"You—you don't mean you honestly believe that?"

Her blue eyes looked up into his. "I think you're the most wonderful man in the world," she breathed.

He scratched his chin ruefully. "Gee! You don't know how silly you make me feel!"

The blue eyes suddenly suffused with tears, and the blond curls were pressed close against his breast. "Oh, Ammie dear! I just can't bear to think of you—over there! Oh!"

"Maybe I won't get there," answered Ammiel hopefully. "Maybe—maybe I'll get flat feet!"

HIS pious wish was not gratified. No obstacles were offered to his becoming an artilleryman, and after a few weeks' study of the U. S. Artillery Drill Regulations and the matériel of the three-inch gun, he was dispatched to France—where no one had heard of the U. S. A. D. R. or the three-inch gun—and he began intensive study of the *soixante-quinze*, with a new set of drill regulations.

This, however, he recognized as merely the army way, not to be caviled at by a mere private. The sole duty of a soldier, he learned from the old-timers who had done their hitches before, was to keep one's mouth closed, one's bowels open, and never, no, never, to volunteer.

The thrill at being, in Stephen's absurd phrase, "in the thick of it," lasted about two weeks. After that, war became merely a matter of digging, and lifting heavy objects, and pushing machinery into muddy places, after which it was pushed out again, of noise and sweat and manure, and occasionally the impact of a bit of steel which either put an abrupt end to things, or, at the price of some pain, took one back to an all but forgotten region where there was no noise, no lice, no mud, and only the not unpleasant odor of lysol.

He rejoiced tepidly when he was made a sergeant. Wearing the chevrons, he was no longer required to put his shoulder to the wheel when some lackwit of a driver got a caisson mired. He had only to stand aside and roll a cigarette, and adjure the section to heave and sweat.

But when his battery was taken out of the line and sent back to what was drolly called a "rest area," to refit and recuperate and drill—chiefly drill—life suddenly became complicated again. An order came to him one morning to report to the officer commanding.

"Spottswood," said the latter sternly, "you've been a good soldier."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"I'll be sorry to lose you."

"*Lose* me?"

"Yes. I'm ordered to pick a likely non-com for transfer to the officer school at Saumur. Well—you're *it*."

Ammiel's forehead wrinkled. "If the captain will excuse me, sir," he stammered, "the captain is mistaken. Sergeant Thorsen, sir—why, he makes me look like a Boy Scout! Besides, sir, he really deserves promotion. He's worked, sir. Worked like hell, sir. He—"

"That'll do," said the C.O. sharply. "I forgot to tell you that I'm not allowed much choice in the matter. I'm practically ordered to send *you*."

"I'll bet that's my family!" exclaimed Ammiel. "They've been pulling wires ever since I enlisted."

The C.O. frowned. "Family? Where?"

"My brother Steve's at Chaumont. Another one's in Washington—some sort of a civvie job."

"Well, they seem to know the army game. Better pack your stuff. The adjutant—"

Ammiel looked his dismay. "Oh, please, sir! They had no business wrangling a commission for me. And honestly, Clem Thorsen—Sergeant Thorsen, sir—he ought to get the chance. Why, he knows more gunnery than any shavetail in the regiment, sir. That is, I mean, sir—"

The C.O. looked puzzled. "You don't seem to *want* to go to Saumur."

"Yes, sir. That's just what I don't want. I'm quite well satisfied where I am, sir. I—"

"But look here," protested the C.O., picking up a document from his table. "The way this thing reads, the only way I can keep from sending you is to report you hopelessly unfit for a commission."

Ammiel's face brightened. "That would be fine! If you tell 'em I'm a dud, they'll let me alone."

The C.O. scratched his head. "You're

a queer duck, Spottswood. I don't want to lose you—but you're too smart to stay in the ranks."

"Maybe it's smarter to stay than get out, sir."

"Why don't you want a commission?"

Ammiel considered the question thoughtfully. "Responsibility, I guess. And officers have to eat in French messes. I'd rather have wheat cakes and maple syrup!"

A twinkle came into the C.O.'s eyes. "Maybe you aren't as nutty as you sound, Spottswood."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir." Ammiel saluted, executed a smart right-about, and marched back to his barracks. His face shone with elation. And he immediately wrote Stephen, at Chaumont, begging him to be more careful in the future.

The C.O. never again referred to the matter. But he presently found it necessary to dispatch Ammiel on a mysterious mission to Paris. It was not until he was on the train that Ammiel understood. "Good old skipper!" he murmured, a little lump in his throat.

THE smiling fields drifted past the car window. The leaves were putting on their russet mantles, and the sun, conscious of its imminent extinction, shone with a cold glitter. In the fields, children and bent old women were making ready for the harvest.

To the east, death was already reaping, unhampered by any thought of season. And still farther, beyond the distant hills, the children and the old women of the enemy toiled in the fields, mumbling in toothless jaws the same smooth phrases about right and liberty. They, too, had offered their all to the scythe of the destroyer, serene in the glory of the sacrifice.

It was absurd. Both could not be wrong. Nor yet, could both be right. And so, what *was* rightness and wrongness?

He took a sheaf of letters from his pocket. There were several from Phyllis, of many pages, but in handwriting so large and round that there were not many words—nor, he reflected, many thoughts. Douglas Padgett had got his captaincy—wasn't that splendid? Expected to be ordered overseas most any day. She was taking a course in nursing—it was too *thrilling!* And Jack Pennypacker had been killed. That brought the war home so—actually knowing some one who was killed. . . .

There was a letter from his mother, full of solicitude for his comfort. She was knitting him a trench helmet for the winter, and sending more socks. Also knee-warmers—he wondered what they might be.

From Jonas was a typewritten memorandum—statistics regarding tonnage and man-power and loans. It was so like Jonas—expressing even war in terms of business. Well, perhaps that was what it was—a fight for markets, with men but the figures on a tallyman's slate.

There was one letter in the cramped, almost undecipherable hand of Dr. Taplow:

> We are all busy hating Germans. I'm glad you're not here. I fancy you find yourself unable to hate Germans. Hate seems to grow in inverse ratio to proximity.
>
> Jonas has some mysterious job which takes him frequently to Washington. He receives no pay, but Bremling-Spottswood appear to supply the deficiency by enormous contracts with the training-camps.
>
> Blanding is out of it—sclerotic arteries, myopia and other reasons. Destine writes recruiting posters and pursues spies. Every one is active and, on the whole, enjoying the war. You are the only flaw. I must caution you about your letters. They lack enthusiasm for the business. Stephen's are better, and have been judiciously used. George Ralston, who is an authority on such matters, declares they'll run Steve for Congress on his war record.
>
> Well, I must resume my post in the flu trenches. Though why, with the world as mad as it is, we should fight to keep people living in it, is a riddle I have not yet solved.

Ammiel put the letter in his pocket. Dr. Taplow's keen old eyes saw through the thing. Right and wrong were like college yells—tags. War was a business, a means of getting on. Jonas with his contracts, Stephen with his politics, Destine getting material for his books. Well, why not? Why shouldn't war be "material"? It was humorous enough. It was absurd to be serious about it. As if dying from a shell splinter was any more serious than dying from indigestion. Dying, itself, wasn't particularly serious. Nothing lasted. And nothing mattered. Nothing, therefore, was worth thinking about, much. Nothing save such things as the dinner he was presently to have in Paris.

It was dark when he reached *la ville lumière*, and after registering with the M.P.'s at the Rue Ste. Anne, whom he found gratuitously disagreeable, he wandered out in the dim blue light of the streets.

He found himself, presently, on the Boulevard des Capucines. Like the hum of insects on a summer evening, soft voices lured him; soft bodies pressed against him out of the darkness. But, smiling, he brushed off the clinging fingers, and nodded at the whispering voices. Not for nothing, he reflected, had he pored over those books which, as a child, had so alarmed his mother. They made him mindful of the rocks behind the Lorelei.

Wandering slowly up toward the Etoile, he presently found the throng behind him, and he paused for a moment, marveling that such stillness could reign in a great city. Then he started, for from the dark cavern of a side street he fancied that he heard a woman pleading tearfully.

From the scimitar edge of the new moon came a faint glint, and in the shadow of a doorway he saw two figures scuffling. One was a man—the familiar cut of the American uniform was unmistakable, and the polished brasses of the Sam Browne belt flashed the signal of rank. Ammiel whistled softly and turned to go. It was no affair of his.

The officer seemed to be of the same opinion. "Get t' hell out of here," he ordered.

His voice was thick, but Ammiel recognized it instantly. Hesitation left him. He stood as stiff as a bayonet.

The officer made a menacing gesture with his riding crop. "Take care, monsieur," warned the woman.

"I'll try to," drawled Ammiel. But instead of retreating, he put his hand on the officer's shoulder. "As for you, sir, bed would be a good idea, I think."

LIKE the snapping of a taut string, the latter collapsed against the doorpost. "For God's sake," he cried, a curious awe in his voice, "Ammiel!"

Ammiel nodded. "In the flesh. Come on, old bean—let's go beddie-by."

"But let me explain!" cried the officer in an anguished tone. "I—"

"You can do that later," said Ammiel soothingly. "Come on. Let's beat it. The town's full of M.P.'s."

Shaking off Ammiel's guiding hand, the officer drew himself up in an effort at dignity. "Don' need help," he snarled thickly. "You're spy. Tha's what you are—spy. No business bein' here. I'm s'prised at you—tha's what I am." He turned abruptly and started up the street.

"Steve—wait!" Ammiel sprang after the retreating figure. But the latter brushed him roughly aside. "No—nothing do with you. You're spy—tha's all."

Just then, with an inquiring squawk of its horn, a stray taxi drew up at the curb. Still muttering, the officer sprang into it. "Continental—*vite!*" he shouted. Ammiel leaped forward, but the door slammed in his face, and the cab wheezed away toward the boulevard.

Ammiel turned. The girl still stood in the doorway. "He was not at all *gentil*," she said gravely. "But then—he was drunk."

For the first time Ammiel realized that she was not what he had thought. Her voice had that subtle quality of refinement which can be neither imitated nor assumed.

"He made a bad mistake," he exclaimed with sudden intuition.

"You—seemed to know him?"

"Slightly. One doesn't always know one's brother very well."

"Your brother—oh, how dreadful!"

"You speak English well," said Ammiel irrelevantly.

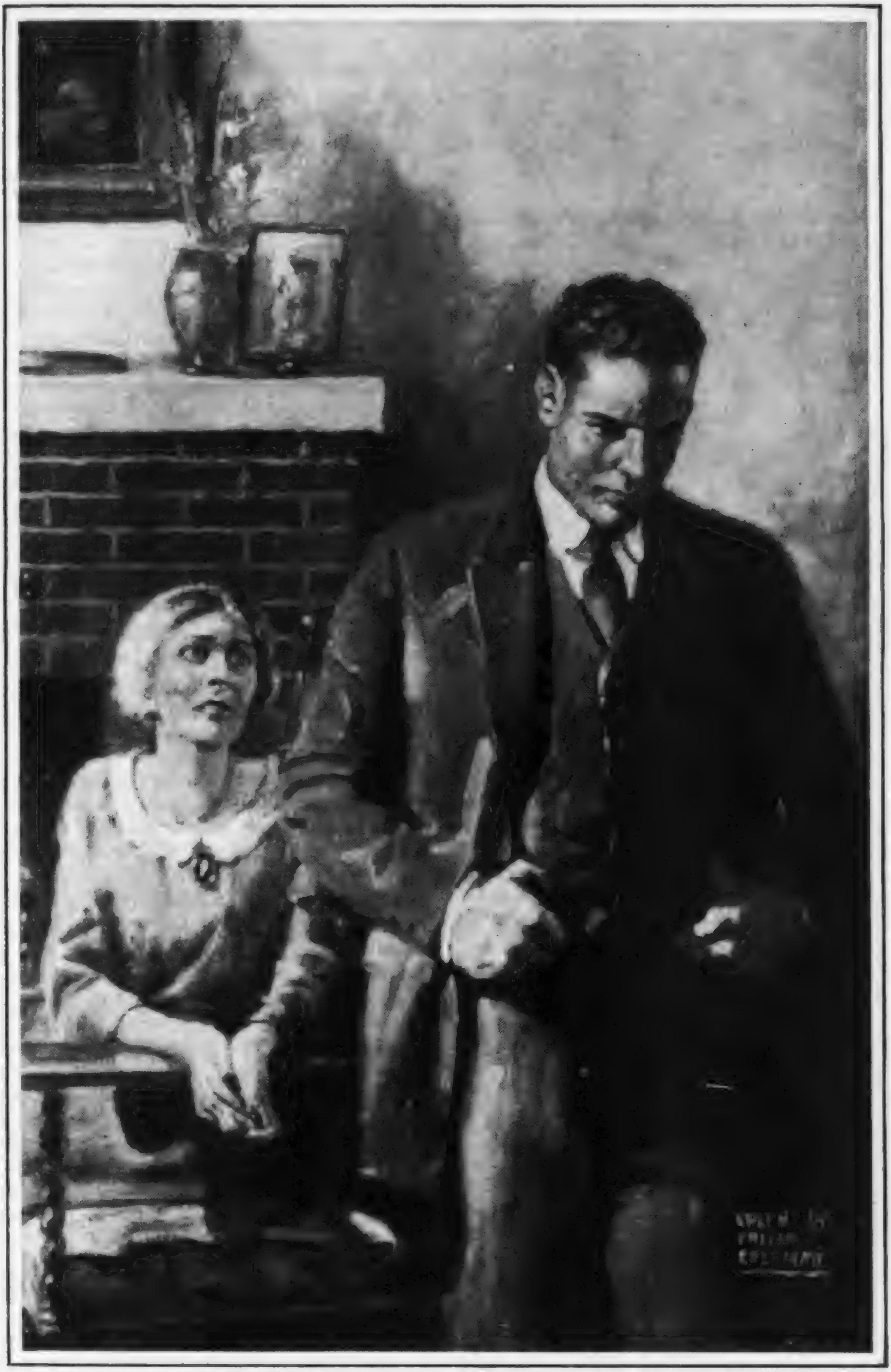
"My mother was American," she explained. "I lived in New York until I was seventeen. But let me explain about your brother. You must not have too hard thoughts of him."

"I have no hard thoughts," answered Ammiel quietly. Then he chuckled, and it ripened into a full-throated laugh, until the echoes ran up and down the empty street. "You see, he's always been held up to me as the model of all earthly virtue. And now—well, he'll have a bad case of remorse when he wakes up tomorrow, expecting me and my highly moral lecture. That'll be a stiff one—taking a lecture from *me!*"

"But you must understand," she insisted, not understanding his laughter. "He had been drinking—"

"Never touched a drop at home!"

"He—he thought I was one of those creatures of which there are so many, alas, on the boulevards. You see, I work evenings in a canteen in the Gare St. Lazare. My father disapproves. But then, he is so French—so strict—"



Ammiel inclined his head. "I expect war will be uncomfortable. I never did like camping out. But it'll be more uncomfortable—being comfortable."

"Where is your father?"

"In Saloniki. He is a colonel of artillery."

"May I see you home?" said Ammiel abruptly. "I—I think your father is right."

Her teeth sparkled in the moonlight as she smiled her thanks. "It is not far. Just the other bank.

"Why did you come to my aid?" she asked as they walked toward the Pont Alexandre.

"I didn't. I was seeking adventure."

"Is that why you came to war?"

His laugh was derisive. "There isn't any adventure to war—you ought to know hat."

"You are not a newcomer, then? You are—disillusioned?"

"I was born that way," he answered wearily.

They were on the bridge now. The moon had risen higher, and he could get a better idea of his companion's appearance. She was slender and very delicate of feature, but she walked with a lithe grace that bespoke endurance and strength.

"LISTEN!" She stopped suddenly, pointing.

Far away, from the eastern fringe of the city, came the mournful wail of a siren, with an overtone like the mutter of a faraway thunderstorm. Faint flashes of light pricked the purple blanket of the sky. Down a near-by street roared a fire engine, its horn shrieking. Like a pack of hounds, siren after siren gave voice. Growing momentarily louder, a rhythmic droning sounded directly overhead.

"The Gothas!" she cried, seizing his arm. "We must hurry."

He held back. "Let's see the show."

She shook her head vehemently. "No. No!"

"I didn't think you'd be the sort to be frightened."

"Frightened?" Her laugh was low-pitched and musical. "No—not *that*. But there is work to be done. And there are those who have need of me."

"You are fortunate," said Ammiel thoughtfully. "It must be interesting—having people need you. Well then, let's beat it."

A minute later, panting with the run, they stood before an old house on the Rue de l'Université. She produced a huge iron key. "May I offer you the hospitality of our cellar—no wines, alas, but passable coffee, and—"

"Safety?" he supplied. "Thanks! It's no longer needed. See—the barrage is over. The boche has gone—or rather, there wasn't any boche to begin with. Just French nerves."

The sirens had ceased. Somewhere near by a bugler was triumphantly blowing the *berloque*. In the stillness which followed, there was the sound of bolts being shot back, and from shadowed doorways figures stealthily appeared, congregating in little groups, whispering, presently laughing outright.

"They take life easily—these French," said Ammiel.

"They *seem* to—that is something else," replied the girl. She held out her hand. "Good night, and thank you again. I should like to think that this were not our last meeting."

"I don't even know your name," said Ammiel bluntly.

She made a little curtsy. "Permit me to introduce myself—Mademoiselle Adrienne Marie d'Aulignac. My grandmother, who lived in Grand Rapids, always called me Maria—with the *i* sounded long."

From above, shutters clattered open, and against the moonlight a head was silhouetted. "That will be Madame Berard—my aunt. Dear soul—she is worrying about me. I must go. *A bientôt.*" Slowly, Ammiel retraced his steps across the river. Adrienne Marie d'Aulignac—the syllables echoed the click of his heels on the pavement. Suddenly, he realized that he was homesick. His thoughts flashed to Phyllis—sweet child; it would be pleasant once again to run his fingers through her blond curls, and hear the gentle murmur of her voice. No such longing for the sight and sound and feel of her had been his in months, he reflected wonderingly.

And then he laughed. He was *marching*—shoulders back, arms swinging, regulation stride, regulation cadence. Abruptly, the laugh died. Above the measured tattoo of his boots, like the beat of the drums, his ears were filled with "*Ad—ad—ad—ri—enne.*"

He frowned and changed pace. No

doubt these singular noises were due to the fact that he was hungry.

AMMIEL tried to see Stephen the next morning. But the latter had gone. So he sent him a telegram:

> Rejoice to know you're human. I'll keep the secret.

He spent three days in Paris, partly in charge of a morose "Y" secretary who showed him the "sights," and partly with lonely visitors like himself, who showed him "night life," from the corridors of the Olympia to abodes of iniquity not so well advertised. At the end he was tired and bored and more than ready to return to the cleanly tedium of his battery.

"Paris," declared a chance companion on the train which bore them away, "is a nice place to get out of."

"Yes," he agreed. "But it has its bright spots." He was thinking of a spot on the Rue de l'Université which, for some reason, was extraordinarily vivid in his memory.

The months which followed were quite flat. There was a little more action. And young Boyden, a shy, gentle youth, who was number two on his piece, was killed the day before the Armistice. The irony of that outweighed any thrill to be had from the Armistice itself. But he put it by with a mental shrug. Boyden was definitely not fitted for life. Then he wrote a letter to Boyden's mother, in which he said all the things he did not believe, and none of those he did.

The succeeding months passed slowly, full of drill and boredom, but pass they did. And the day came at last when, quite as if he had been away from her but an hour, Phyllis was in his arms again.

"You're prettier than anything I saw in France," he declared. "Are you as glad to see me as I am to see you?"

"Oh, Ammie! I couldn't have stood it another *hour!* Sometimes I thought I should simply *die!* Such a dreadful dream it was!"

"How's Padge? I understand he didn't get across—though he tried hard enough—the idiot."

"He's home," answered Phyllis, looking down at her folded hands. "He's going right to work. He's not taking any vacation. He feels he has a responsibility to—"

"Poor old Padge—full of responsibilities as a porcupine with quills!"

"Ammiel!" Phyllis had raised her head, and a spot of color burned in either cheek. "What a way to speak!"

HE KISSED her hand. "I beg your pardon. It's my postgraduate course with the mule-skinners."

"Ammiel!" she burst forth as she drew her hand away. "You've changed—oh, you've changed—*dreadfully!* I—I hardly know you."

She clung to that idea with curious perversity, it seemed to him, alternating between moments in which she was either injured or shocked, and those in which she was hurt, almost, once or twice, to the point of tears.

It could not have been, he reflected dismally as he walked away from her house, a more unsatisfactory meeting. For two people supposedly in love with each other, they had quarreled without relief. And they had parted in what could only be described as a state of armed neutrality.

He went straight to Dr. Taplow. "Tell me," he demanded when he was seated in the old leather armchair. "Tell me. *Have* I changed?"

The old man's eyes twinkled under their bushy brows. "Certainly."

"For the worse, I mean?"

"I haven't seen you long enough to tell."

"I shocked Phyllis, and I hurt her. Would you kindly prescribe, Dr. Tap?"

The physician knocked the ashes from his pipe. "I'm a doctor—not an interferer in lovers' quarrels."

"I interfered in a quarrel one night," mused Ammiel. "Paris. Moonlight. I—I wish I hadn't. Well—how's the family?"

"Haven't you seen them?"

"Only mother and Sal. I'm going to see Jonas tomorrow and offer my valued services to Bremling-Spottswood."

"Jonas needs help," said the physician. "He needs your fresh, untrammeled viewpoint."

Ammiel smiled. "I seem to feel an insult."

"If your complete irresponsibility is contagious, he may catch something that will save his life. Fact is, Jonas is on the edge of what is called nervous prostration."

"Old Jonas—that easy-going porpoise? Why, you're joking!"

"On the surface, Jonas does somewhat resemble the fish you mention. But underneath—" The physician pursed his lips and whistled softly.

"But good Lord!" exclaimed Ammiel. "He supports the family. If he cracks—"

"I've suggested California. But he scents a panic in the offing—says business may go smash any day. Well, maybe you'll be good for him. Next time he sees me about not sleeping or spots in his eyes, I'll prescribe you."

"Gosh!" murmured Ammiel, his eyes wide. "Old Jonas—*nerves!* It bowls me over almost as much as—as— Funny how much you don't know about your own family, isn't it, Dr. Tap?"

"Everybody has secrets."

"Well, how about the others? How's Hester?"

"Her mind and mine have no common divisor," said the doctor curtly. "Therefore, we avoid each other."

Ammiel grinned. "Hettie'll never get over being a Spottswood. And Casper—think of piling a Blanding on a Spottswood. Thank God, Sarah's going to be satisfied with a Destine!"

"Sarah's out of my orbit, too. I'm a dull old medico, knowing little of verse, free or unconfined, less about painting, cubistic, spheristic or rhomboid, and nothing about the new music. She showed me a poem of Destine's—some magazine gave him a prize for it. I told her it looked like a case for a neuro-pathologist. So I'm as high in her esteem as I am in Cecily's."

"What did you do to *her?*"

"Merely suggested she do the family washing, since nothing else had cured what ailed her. I'm sorry for that. I could have saved Stephen a lot of money if I'd kept her as a patient. She's working now with a faith-healer."

Ammiel rose. "I suppose I ought to be as glad to get home as I thought I was going to be. But—do you know where I'd like to be this minute, Dr. Tap?"

"Of course," answered the physician. "Back in France."

Ammiel sighed. "I suppose that's what life is—always wanting to be where you aren't. But it doesn't pay to think too much about life, does it?"

"It doesn't pay at all," growled the doctor. "Think less and do more."

Ammiel clicked his heels together and saluted. "I'll try to follow your advice, sir."

The old man shrugged his shoulders. "I seem to recall no precedent for that, sir."

FINDING Jonas occupied when he presented himself at the offices of Bremling-Spottswood & Company, Ammiel sat down to wait. The bench was uncomfortable, and as he looked around the room he shuddered. His life was to be bounded, henceforth, by four rather soiled walls, with windows looking out on a soiled prospect beyond. It could, of course, be endured. The last year had taught him how much a man can endure. But there had always been the thought of *la guerre finie.* Here there could be no end save death.

Presently the secretary nodded, and he went in to see Jonas.

"My!" exclaimed the latter. "Soldiering did you good. Straightened your shoulders—made a man of you!"

"They say it makes a man or a yellow dog out of you," said Ammiel noncommittally. He looked thoughtfully out of the window, at the smoky expanse of red brick. "It had its nice side." Then his lips went straight with resolution. "Well, I'm ready to go to work."

Jonas nodded. "Good! Any special ideas?"

"I've been in the ranks," laughed Ammiel. "It's against the rules for a soldier to have ideas."

"But you must know what you—well, what you're fitted for."

"I'm fitted for nothing. But I've got to make a living, and marry, and—"

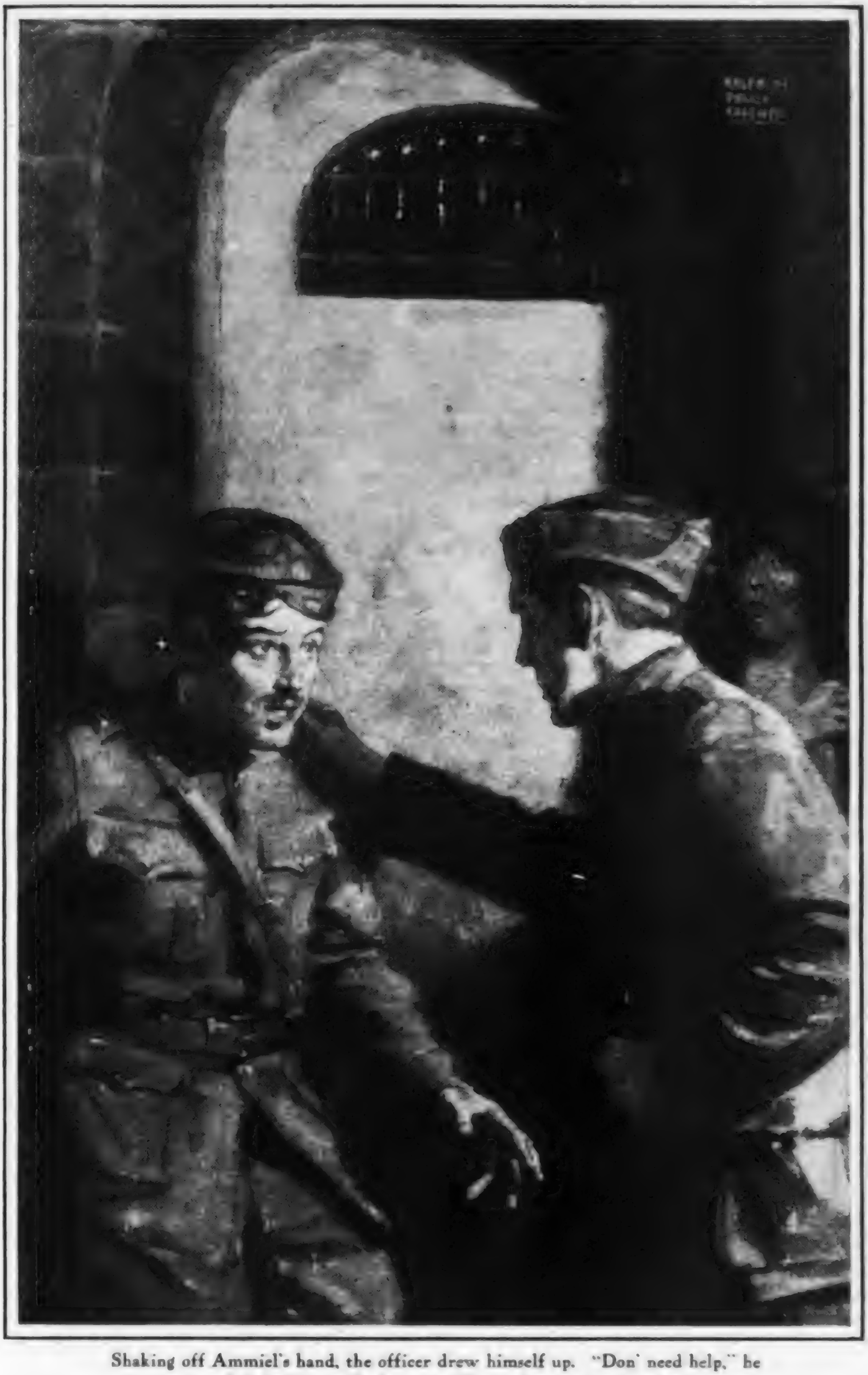
"You've got to be more serious," rumbled Jonas. "You'll never get on if you're flippant about things. You've got to work hard, and—if you come in here—"

"When," corrected Ammiel.

"All right—when you come in here, you've got to start at the bottom. I want you to get ahead on your merits."

Ammiel looked at his cigarette. "I'd like to finish this before the iron doors clang. I understand you don't allow smoking in the plant."

"No." Jonas touched a button at his



Shaking off Ammiel's hand, the officer drew himself up. "Don' need help," he snarled thickly. "You're spy. Tha's what you are—spy."

elbow. "Now then, boy—we'll see what stuff you're made of. I'm going to start you in the receiving-room."

"Rustling crates, eh? All right. And how much do I get?"

"Twelve dollars a week," snapped Jonas. "And you'll most certainly get fired if you don't earn it!"

"Fair enough," agreed Ammiel. "This isn't a home for disabled veterans."

The door opened, and a man in his shirt-sleeves entered. "You wanted me, Mr. Spottswood?"

"Charley, this is my brother, Ammiel. I want you to give him some overalls and put him to work. No favors, mind—he's here on his merits."

The man nodded and looked inquiringly at Ammiel. The latter extended his hand. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Legree."

"My name is Vopicka," said the man doubtfully.

Ammiel smiled. "Legree's your stage name." He turned to Jonas, snapping his heels together. "Any further orders, sir?"

Jonas saluted awkwardly. "Not this morning, private."

Ammiel pointed to the open doorway. "Lead on, Mr. Vopicka-Legree. Let us proceed to work our way up."

THE months passed, and Ammiel toiled at his appointed tasks in the plant of Bremling-Spottswood & Company.

"But they're so silly," he complained, as he sat one evening in Dr. Taplow's library. "The war was silly enough—but business makes war seem almost sensible."

"I know nothing of business," growled the physician.

"It took me about thirty seconds to learn my first job. But they kept me at it nearly three months."

"Maybe they were just testing you out?"

Ammiel waved the suggestion aside. "I'm in the foundry now. I'm learning how to carry sand. That's a very difficult art, Dr. Tap—and shoveling it—my word!"

"The impatience of youth," began the physician. But Ammiel checked him.

"Please—that's too much like Jo!"

"Jonas is a very capable young man," said the doctor severely. "It will pay you to listen to him."

Ammiel stretched his legs toward the glowing coals in the little fireplace. "We're going to announce our engagement pretty soon," he said irrelevantly. "Think we ought to?"

"That's no affair of mine, is it?"

"It isn't that I didn't love Phyllis," continued Ammiel pensively. "I did."

"Implying that you don't?"

Ammiel shook his head. "I didn't say that. Only—getting engaged is the curtain-raiser to marriage. And on fifteen a week—" He opened his hands in a gesture of helplessness.

"There are people who marry on that."

Ammiel grinned forlornly. "Can you picture Phyllis as one of them?"

"You've lots of time to think of marriage!" exclaimed the doctor gruffly. "Why, you're a mere infant."

"I'm approaching twenty-five. That's why I'm melancholy."

There was a long silence. Finally Ammiel rose. "It's hardest on Phyllis," he declared moodily. "I'd sweat in the foundry without a peep if it wasn't for her."

"Nonsense! Where's your ambition?"

"I haven't any. Never did have. Born short, I guess. All this talk about getting ahead—it fills me with a kind of illness."

"Well—what *do* you want to do?"

"Nothing."

"Look here!" exploded the physician, seizing Ammiel by the shoulders. "You need some plain talk, young man. It's enough to have Jonas threatened with mental shipwreck without your joining him."

"I haven't anything to wreck," laughed Ammiel.

"Women!" stormed the doctor, thrusting Ammiel back into the leather armchair. "They wreck everything they get their hands on. Look here—you're no more in love with that girl than—than I am!"

"How can you tell?"

The old man wagged his finger under Ammiel's nose. "I'm no doctor of souls. But if I can't tell when a man's in love, I can tell when he's not!"

"And you think I'm not?"

"Of course you're not!"

"I wonder." Ammiel stared at the floor, his chin resting in his hand. Abruptly, as if the thread of thought had snapped, he rose. "Much obliged for the treatment, sir. I feel better already."

"What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to tell Jonas that the time

has come to recognize my merit. He's got to come through, or I shall, in that phrase of the vulgar, leave him flat."

"Hold on," cried the doctor. "Jonas is not a well man. He needs you. He—"

"He does not," replied Ammiel gravely. "Nobody does."

WHEN Jonas reached his office the next morning, Ammiel was waiting for him, seated on the edge of the desk, reading the newspaper.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Jonas.

"I am here," replied Ammiel, with a flourish, "to announce a revolt of the Praetorian guard."

"A what?" Jonas frowned. "I do wish you'd try to be more serious, Ammiel."

"Well, all right," said Ammiel. "I'll be serious. I—"

Jonas looked at his watch. "I'm awfully busy. Couldn't you see me tonight?"

"One of the lessons you have taught me," replied Ammiel, making no move to leave his perch, "is never to put off till tonight what you can do this morning. And I'm in an awful hurry for what I need. I need money."

"Oh, is that all!" Jonas looked relieved and reached for his check-book.

"Wait!" Ammiel raised his hand. "It's more than that. I don't want a loan. I want a raise."

"But—you've had a raise."

"You don't understand, Jo," said Ammiel patiently. "I'm not kicking at my wages. I'm getting all I'm worth. But at this pace I'll have false teeth before I can ring the wedding bells."

"Well, what do you want me to do?" queried Jonas helplessly.

Ammiel sighed. "I don't know. Only—you see what I'm up against, don't you?"

Jonas nodded sympathetically, but said nothing.

"How much can a fellow marry on?" asked Ammiel after a pause. "Our kind."

"Well, I was getting twenty-five hundred. But with prices the way they are now—"

Ammiel sighed again. "The funniest thing about it is that Phyllis will be indecently rich, some day. Meanwhile—"

Jonas coughed uncomfortably. "You really haven't earned it yet, Ammie. But—er—I'll tell the bookkeeper to make your check twenty-five, beginning Monday."

A momentary light came into Ammiel's eyes. "You're a good fellow, Jo. Thanks a lot!" He held out his hand. "Excuse my bothering you. But—life's gotten kind of full of knots."

"It has a way of doing that," muttered Jonas as he turned to his papers. "It has, indeed."

IT WAS a warm evening in early spring, and he thought nothing of the fact that one of the windows in the Jerrold house was open when he passed. But he heard a familiar voice, and he halted.

Phyllis, he knew, was not expecting him. He should, therefore, have resented Padgett's presence. But he did not feel resentment. He felt only a most extraordinary elation. His heart, which a moment before had been so heavy, seemed now fairly singing.

He could not hear what Padgett was saying, and he was glad of that. It was not necessary to hear the words. Against the partly drawn shade lay the shadow of two heads—not far apart.

He tarried no longer. Briskly, his lips curved in a tuneless whistle, he went home.

"There's some mail for you, dear," said his mother when he came in. "It came by special delivery. I put it on your bureau."

Still whistling, he went up to his room. After a moment's hesitation, he tore open the envelope, and took out the letter. The large round characters covered all four pages:

> Ammiel, dear, please don't be angry with me for doing it this way, but I thought it would be easier for both of us. Oh, Ammie, dear! It was a mistake. It just couldn't be. It breaks my heart to have to say this, but it's better to have a little sadness now than have a lot later on, isn't it? Oh, Ammiel dear, I'm *so* sorry, and I *do* hope you'll understand, and forgive me. I've prayed and prayed and only tried to do what is right. I don't think it's necessary to say anything about this, seeing that we weren't really engaged, but I guess it'll soon be around, so I'm glad father's going to take me abroad. It'll be easier for you, too, Ammie dear, and you can say anything you *like* about me, and I guess it'll be true because I never could be the kind of wife you ought to have. And you know I wish you all the luck and happiness in the world, don't you? I do. I do. I DO! Oh, Ammie, I can't write any more. I'm just *too* heartbroken!

With the utmost deliberateness, Ammiel tore the note into tiny shreds, letting them filter slowly through his fingers into the waste-basket. From his expression at that moment, one might have thought that his chief emotion was perplexity.

He stood for a long time, staring at himself in the pier-glass. His eyes were full of puzzled inquiry, his lips twisted in a rather shocked little smile.

Then he shrugged his shoulders. It was hardly surprising that since he could not experience the emotion of love, he should not feel the faintest twinge of jealousy—not even the prideful chagrin he knew he ought to feel.

The chains had dropped from him. In the still cold world which was his heart, freedom reigned.

ON THE morning of his twenty-fifth birthday, Ammiel found a long envelope beside his plate. It was addressed to "Ammiel Bremling-Spottswood, Esquire."

"What a name to carry single-handed!" he said, as he opened it.

"It is a name to be proud of," was his mother's reply.

Inside the large envelope was a smaller one, similarly addressed in a bold but tremulous hand; and a brief, typewritten letter.

> Dear Sir:
>
> By the will of your grandfather, Mr. Ammiel Spottswood, we are directed to hand you the enclosed letter on this day.
>
> In the absence from the country of Mr. Albert Twyman, the undersigned will be pleased to discuss the matter with you.
>
> Very truly yours,
> JOHN CURRIER.

"What is it, dear?" asked his mother.

"A letter from the Inland Trust," answered Ammiel absently, as he opened the smaller envelope. From it fluttered a single sheet of paper, dated July 18, 1899.

> As I write this, you are a lad of four. As you read it, you are a man grown.
>
> The Inland Trust has been directed to turn over to you, in bonds and mortgages, the sum of ten thousand dollars. Of advice as to its use I have none to give. I hazard only the opinion that money is overrated. Some esteem it the source of all ill. Others think it the key to such happiness as lies locked in life. Both, I believe, are wrong.
>
> Your grandfather,
> AMMIEL SPOTTSWOOD.

Ammiel leaned back in his chair, his mouth pursed in a soundless whistle. Then he raised his eyes and met the inquiring gaze of his mother. Still mute, he tossed her the letter.

"Oh, Ammiel—your dear grandfather!"

Unsmiling, he folded the letter and put it into his pocket.

"But Ammie, dear!" she exclaimed. "Aren't you—why, you don't seem a bit excited!"

"Excited? If you knew how excited I am, you'd call a doctor," he said gravely.

Ammiel was thinking hard and definitely as he sought out Mr. John Currier. "Why, we've met before!" he exclaimed in some surprise as they shook hands. "You're a friend of Sarah's."

The smile faded from Currier's lips. "I used to call—before her engagement to Mr. Destine." There was an imperceptible stiffening of his manner. "Regarding my letter, I—"

"I remember now," persisted Ammiel, as he noted the silver button in the other man's lapel. "You were in the Marines and got crocked—mother wrote me about it." Then he grinned: "I suppose you've read Destine's book—'The Yellow Tassel'?"

Currier shook his head coldly.

"You ought to," chuckled Ammiel. "It certainly shows up the awfulness of soldiering."

"I didn't know Mr. Destine was in the service."

"He wasn't. That's why he writes so wonderfully about it. Sal thinks it's great. She just hates militarism, you know. Can't understand why we boys will insist on fighting."

"About this legacy," interrupted Currier. "Here is a list of the securities. The total is—"

"That's very interesting," said Ammiel indifferently. "But I'm not good at figures. I'll take your word for it."

"But—" Currier looked a little bewildered.

"This responsibility unnerves me. You hire a box for me downstairs, and put the stuff in it. Meanwhile, I'll be thinking how to spend it."

"Spend it?" echoed Currier in a tone of amazement. "Surely you won't touch the principal?"

"Why not?" queried Ammiel blandly. "What else is it good for?" Then he added, after a moment's thought. "Maybe I won't, though. Not right away, anyhow.

I've got to figure what my ticket's going to cost."

"Your ticket?"

"Yes. I'm contemplating a trip. Well—see you later."

"Please convey my regards to Sarah," said Currier diffidently, as he accepted Ammiel's hand. "I—I haven't seen her for some time."

"You're somewhat lucky," was Ammiel's dry comment. "I see her every day."

Jonas received the news of the legacy with no visible emotion. "Grandfather was a mighty shrewd man. If you'd gotten that money when you were younger, you wouldn't have a cent of it now."

"Probably not," agreed Ammiel.

"As it is, by investing it carefully—"

"I understand," interrupted Ammiel. "I understand perfectly. But you see, Jo—I've got another idea. You'll think it's foolish, I guess. But—"

Jonas showed signs of alarm. "What are you up to now?"

"No crime," laughed Ammiel. "Only, I don't like business. And I can't stand the family hanging crape on me over Phyllis. And so—well, I think I'll go abroad."

"BUT what'll you do over there?" cried Jonas.

"Nothing. That's why I'm going. I've figured it out. I can get about six thousand francs a year. That's no fortune, but—"

"But what'll you *do?*" repeated Jonas in bewilderment.

"Oh, sit in a café and watch the world go by. Not a bad life, really."

"But, Ammiel!" cried Jonas, getting up from his desk. "You're out of your head! A man can't live a life like that—doing *nothing*. A man's got to work—"

Ammiel shook his head. "Pure convention, Jo. Work's not an end in itself—it's a means. People work because they've got to get food and shelter and take care of a family. Well, grandfather—bless him—takes care of the first two—and the other's never going to bother me."

"Yes, but—you work for—for—oh, accomplishment!" stammered Jonas helplessly. "You can't be just a—a—"

"Idler?" supplied Ammiel. "Why not? I've known some perfectly contented idlers. And I've known workers that weren't—I don't think you're so very happy, Jo."

"That's not the point," answered Jonas, unexpectedly wincing. "We weren't talking about me. We were talking about you. You can't do this idiotic thing. Really you can't."

Ammiel unconcernedly lit a cigarette. "Oh, yes, I can! I can try it, anyhow. If it doesn't work out, why—as the philosopher put it—the saving grace of this life is the fact that while there is but one entrance, there are any number of exits."

"Good God!" exclaimed Jonas in a horrified tone.

Ammiel rose. And then, suddenly, as if he had been struck dumb, he stood motionless, a far-away expression in his eyes.

"What's the matter?" cried Jonas, starting from his desk.

"Listen!" Ammiel raised his hand. His eyes were closed. "The *alerte!*"

"Oh!" Jonas fell back, relieved. "That's just a fire somewhere. Gosh, you scared me!"

With a little jerk, Ammiel opened his eyes and smiled. "A siren—it always takes me back to—I got caught in an air-raid, one night in Paris. Funny I should remember that so well." His voice fell to a whisper. "There were so many other things."

He shook himself, and in a kind of daze, went downstairs to clean out his desk. The task brought him from his dream and made him smile. There was nothing in the desk he ever wished to see again. Scissors, ruler, rubber bands, paper clips—symbols of his clerkly peonage—he swept them into a drawer. Forms, blanks, copies of correspondence—all followed. Some one else might file them if he chose. The filing of documents struck him suddenly as an epitome of business—men and women busily putting away wordy papers for a future use that they knew in their hearts would never come. His eye fell on a yellow sheet, closely typed with the size, weight, and lesser details concerning pipe, tees, nipples, gaskets and cocks. He chuckled grimly as he tore it into bits. On the empty expanse of the desk top there remained only a half-smoked package of cigarettes. He put them in his pocket, and turned to go.

As he did so, he heard his name called. A man of his own age, and with something vaguely familiar about him, was inquiring for him. He stepped forward. And then, with an exclamation of astonishment, he held out his hand. "For Gosh sake—Clem Thorsen! Where in thunder did you drop from?"

The other grinned. "Guess I haven't seen you since I left the outfit to go to Saumur. Gee, long time ago, eh? I heard how you fixed it with the skipper to send me instead of you, and—"

"Can that," said Ammiel brusquely. "I liked my job and I wanted to keep it, that's all."

"The hell you did! I—I meant to write about it, Spotty—send *beaucoup* thanks an' all that. But—I'm a punk writer. I—"

Ammiel interrupted him. "What are you doing now, Clem?"

"Oh, after I got out I went to Detroit. Couldn't get a job for a long time, an' when I did, the company busted. So I drifted over here. I got a job down on motor row."

"Like it?"

Thorsen looked surprised at the question. "Sure, I like it—why?"

Ammiel smiled whimsically. "Ever have any hankerings for vermouth cassis and vin blanc? There's no eighteenth amendment in France!"

"Damn the amendment!" declared Thorsen feelingly. "They double-crossed us guys right, I'll tell the world! Gee! When I was walkin' the streets—flat, I was, an' hungry—yes, sir, *starvin'*—I used to think of the war. It wasn't such a hell of a lot of fun—but we had steady jobs, anyhow."

"It had its bright side," said Ammiel reminiscently.

"It did that," agreed Thorsen. "But I didn't come here to gas about the *guerre*. Fact is, I—er—well, I'd like some advice."

"You flatter me," murmured Ammiel, his eyes growing cold.

THORSEN frowned. "It ain't a touch," he said stiffly. "I'm no panhandler, Spotty. I've got a business proposition. Yes, sir." He drew his chair closer and brought out a package of papers. "Look here! Have you noticed how gasoline's been goin' up, lately?"

"No. Has it?"

"Yes. An' it'll go higher. An' the quality's goin' down. The gas we get nowadays don't vaporize quick. Result? Diluted oil."

"How awful!" murmured Ammiel.

"Why, say! You ought to see the cars that come into our shop—bearings all shot, pistons warped, cylinders scored—"

"Don't reveal any more!" begged Ammiel.

"Well—" Thorsen leaned forward and his tone became confidential. "Somethin' had to be done about it. An' it's *been* done!"

Ammiel yawned. "What has?"

"It's a sort of carbureter and condenser combined," explained Thorsen. "Y'see, the bum gas we get now is *wet*—"

"Oh, yes—of course—wet!"

"An' that means preignition, knocks, fouled plugs—junk cars. Well, this here gadget heats the gas, an' dries it. It works like a superheater on a locomotive. It gives you pick-up an' pep. You can throttle down on high to a crawl. It cuts out gear-shifting. The motor don't vibrate near as much. It's absolutely fool-proof. It cuts down gas consumption twenty or thirty per cent. How do I know? Why, tests, of course—actual tests! I know what it'll do, all right. But I can't go any further. Of course I could take it to somebody like Jerry Slippak—he makes the Sico Carbureter, you know. But he might hog it. I'd take a chance on that, myself, but my partner—"

"Oh, you have a partner? What's his name?"

Thorsen smiled. "It ain't a him—it's a her. Guess I forgot to tell you how I got a-hold o' this thing."

Ammiel glanced at his watch. "How did you?" he inquired politely.

"Well, it goes back quite a ways. I was in Paris, in one of the railway stations, an' I had a long time to wait, an' I got hungry, an' I went into the canteen an' got to talkin' to one o' the girls—a humdinger, she was, too—an'—"

"You haven't told me her name, yet."

"Oh, it's a froggy enough name. But she's more'n half Yank. Why, she speaks better English than I do, by a long sight. She—"

"What did you say her name was?" asked Ammiel again. He was aware that his muscles had grown tense.

"D'Aulignac," said Thorsen. "Adrienne d'Aulignac. But I call her 'Marie'—it's easier to say."

"Yes—so it is," said Ammiel, very quietly.

"She's a wonderful girl," continued Thorsen, with a note of something like reverence in his voice. "You see, she was pretty well fixed. But her father got bumped off, an' all he had was in Russian bonds, so Marie was left flat. All she had was the old man's drawings for this gas thing. So darned if she doesn't up an' beat it for the States, hopin' she could get somebody over here to take it. That's how I met her again. She came to Detroit. I ran into her on the street."

"Is she in Detroit now?"

Thorsen shook his head. "No, her money ran out. So I got her a job here. I knew a guy who's a floor-walker at Spiegel-Klein's. She's makin' pretty good money sellin' hats."

AMMIEL nodded, as Thorsen went on with the story. But he heard no more. The years dropped away, and he was again on the Pont Alexandre, the air trembling with the mutter of the barrage, the pale flicker of the moonlight reddening against the roof-tops with the glare of a bursting bomb. A girl stood beside him. She had continued to stand, through the years which followed, he reflected. There had been something about her—the straight candor with which she looked at one, the odd mixture of grace and resolution in her carriage, her quiet answer to his disdain of death: these things had made a print upon his memory. But why so deep a print? She had said nothing, been nothing, done nothing, beyond what had been of his experience countless times before and since.

"Well," he demanded abruptly, "what do you want me to do?"

Thorsen rubbed his finger tips together—they were ridged with fine whorls of black, recalcitrant to the most patient applications of soap and pumice. "I thought you'd recognize a good thing when you saw it. Now we can get down to brass tacks."

"I'd like to meet your partner," said Ammiel.

"Sure! We'll have lunch together. Tomorrow?"

"It will not be too soon."

"Good!" Thorsen folded up his papers. "We gotta get together, Spotty, you an' me, an' hash over the days in the old outfit, eh?"

Ammiel took the hand held out to him. "That would be fun," he agreed absently. "So long, Clem."

"Till tomorrow, Spotty."

"Till tomorrow, Clem." Ammiel turned to his empty desk. He had decided that his application for a passport could wait.

A still greater surprise is in store for Ammiel: to find himself, the dreamer, the main prop of his family, holding it from ruin—in February EVERYBODY'S, out January 15.

Quitting Time

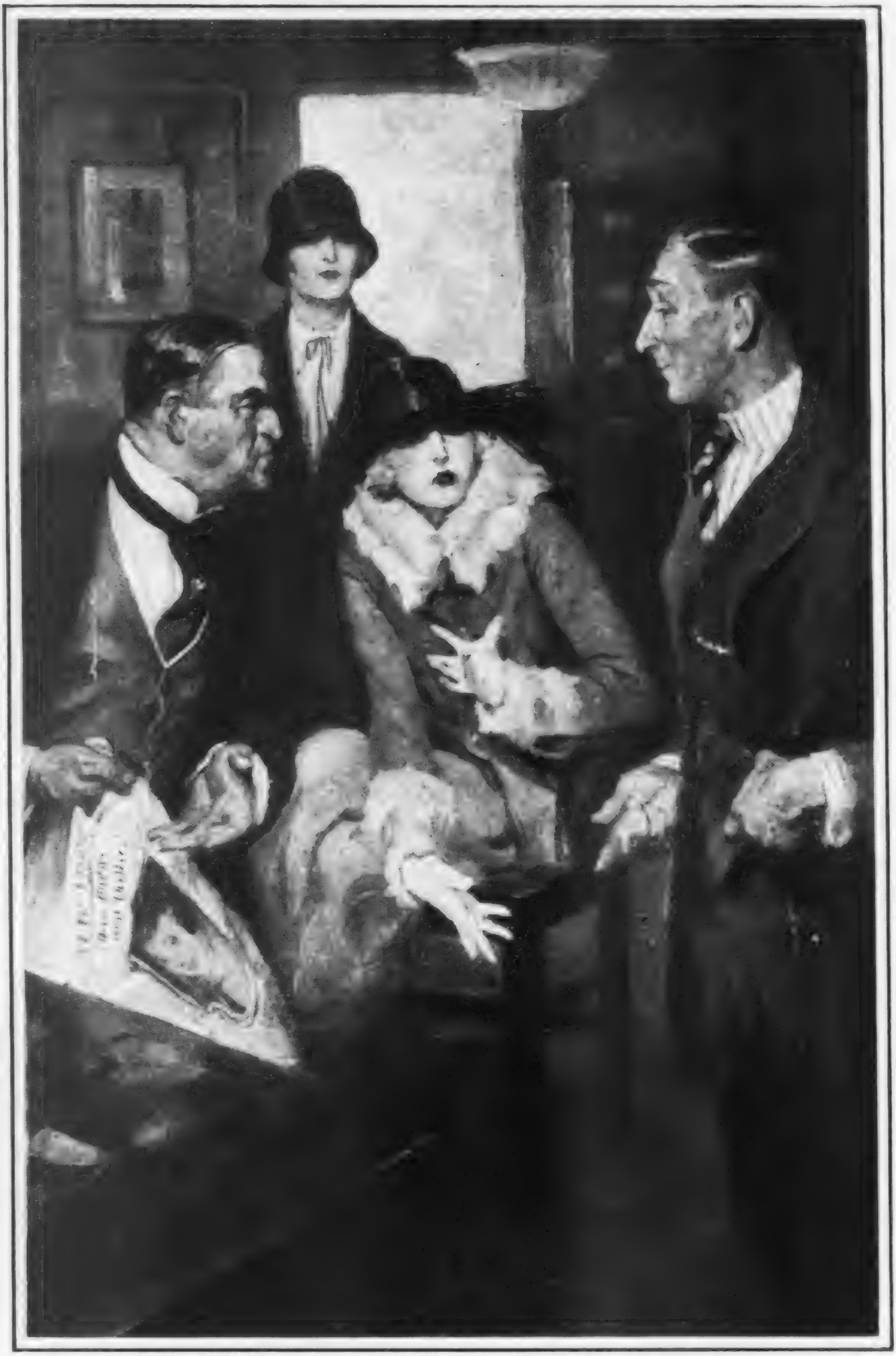
By Faith Baldwin

THE figures on the ledger
Erase before my eyes,
And in their stead I see the red
Of mad Adventure's skies.

I see the hidden treasure
Beyond the sunset's rim,
And faery gold in caverns old
At dawn, when stars grow dim.

O galleons of Romance
On an uncharted sea,
The laughing gales that fill your sails
Take voice and call to me!

For city streets are stony
To feet that would be bare
To take the way, past night and day,
That leads to Anywhere!



Glaze came clothed in confidence and fairly swaggering. "Well, some showing this morning, eh? How'd the little lady like it?"

Introducing a Barnum of Filmland

The Star-Maker

Milt Glaze and His Theory That Stars Are Made, Not Born, That It's Easier to Manufacture a New One Than to Renovate an Old One, Come a Couple of Croppers

By Gayne Dexter

Illustration by Courtney Allen

MILTON GLAZE found much to admire on Broadway as long as store windows, mirrors and show cases reflected a slender person whose long-skirted coat had a button or two too many and slanting side-pockets, and whose trousers clung tightly to his calves, but loosened into flapping bells about the feet. Snappy-looking fellow, nifty dresser what with that brown suit—which was triplicated at home in dark green and pearl gray—the derby cocked so-so, the black patent shoes with gray suède tops, and collar to match his shirt. Sort of guy who could take a fillum into the toughest town in New England—an', boy, that's the coldest movin'-pitcher territory this side of Iceland—and give 'em a campaign every exhibitor in America would break his neck to copy. Knock 'em dead. Ideas. Stunts. Tie-ups. Ballyhoos. And if anybody wanted to put over a star, leave her to Milton. Made dozens of them, and one of these days he was going to get his claws on one for himself: then good-by those punks who'd just been relying on his ideas for their fame. Lil old star-maker. Watch Milton.

And Milton did—all the way up Broadway toward Forty-ninth Street with regrettable eclipses where stores gaped at side thoroughfares; but even here was flattering mental stimulus.

That dark-haired dame waiting to cross, f'rinstance. Give him the dough to swing his ideas, and in six months fans in Oshkosh would be writing for her photograph and theaters would be twenty-four-sheeting her all through the sticks. As it was, what was she? Somebody's stenog. Easy to look at, though, with her clear straight nose and chin you'd guess jibed nicely with her forehead, even if her lid did hide most of that. Good photographing face, he'd say. Sort of familiar. Aha!

She looked at Glaze, then quickly away.

Giving Milty a tumble, uh? Pretty early, but aw right-ee!

Glaze edged beside the girl, who, regretting her single glance, kept her face averted and prayed for the whistle to change traffic currents and permit escape. Glaze coughed for attention.

"Let's see, kiddo: where was it we met?"

"In your office, Mr. Glaze," Sadie Gordon replied, turning to insure identification, which stripped Milton of enthusiasm but left him undismayed. Since when could a man not speak to his own stenographer on Broadway? He felt righteous.

"Right first time, Sadie. Howza girl, anyhow? You're so snappy this morning in all the new bunting I—I had to look twice before I recognized you. What is it—heavy date tonight, or ten-round contest with a photographer? Mention my name over at Floren's and they'll give you professional rates. C'mon! Let's go."

They walked ahead in silence. Sadie Gordon burned. She saw too much of Milton Glaze in the publicity department of Supernal Pictures to invite or appreciate five minutes of his presence outside. He was tawdry; so cocksure of himself; she knew just what he would do if that man who greeted "Howdy, Milt?" and leered at her, inquired about her afterward. Glaze would wink heavily and do up another coat button. He made her feel so obvious, not only to others by public association, but also to herself by his quick conclusions: new bunting, photographer's. Worst of all, he was right.

By Spartan self-denial Sadie had accumulated twenty-four dollars for one sepia-tinted fling: a sitting during lunch hour today, three poses and two dozen portraits in Floren's best professional style and size. Long craving had elevated this extravagance to sheer necessity to her *amour-propre.*

Glaze broke in with that assertive twang, of his—Coney Island cockney; something about not realizing what a peacherino she was, and if she'd stop up-staging him they could be happy little playmates. She did not answer but drew definitely away and reached the office hating all New Yorkers except one.

AMONG the distinctions between twenty-five hundred dollars a week and humble twenty-five at Supernal's executive office was that of doors. Before an arch of triumph sat uniformed pages, trained to spot stars at sight, and, sensing peace or war, escort them elaborately to the president's suite, or defiantly into the legal den. A time clock guarded the humbler entrance, and here was perennial war. Through one door Sadie Gordon had been enticed; through the other, driven with full impetus of tragedy and slight force of dying hope. No one could accuse Supernal of repudiation; on the contrary, the legal department was ever ready to prove complete fulfilment of Sadie's contract—and any and all contracts—but just because some harebrained publicity man had arranged a beauty contest in Edgeville, Missouri, with an engagement in Supernal Pictures as prize, the studio pay-roll should not be forever burdened. Four weeks at seventy-five a week—that was fair enough. And, lifting Supernal's beneficence beyond mere contractual bounds—was Miss Gordon a stenographer? The publicity department needed one. Twenty-five dollars a week; and—well, yes, there might be studio opportunities later. Meanwhile, learn publicity methods and values; there were stars who would sacrifice five hundred feet of close-up for such experience. . . .

This was two years later, and each day Sadie Gordon had multigraphed romances of success to impress the truth of her own failure, although no letter home admitted it. There she was "still with Supernal"; but here, a crutch for fame amid screaming art and posters, strident telephones, dope sheets, production stills and ten men's alibis or hallelujahs, she saw the stage set and reset for minor tragedies similar to her own. The lines she knew by heart.

"'. . . after which Blacktown's prize-winning beauty was escorted to Supernal's mammoth studios, where her feet will be set on the path to stardom. Early announcements of her first production are anxiously awaited by the entire industry.' Fix that up, Miss Gordon, willya, and shoot it to the Blacktown papers, special from Milton Glaze. Great stuff, beauty contests, eh, Sparky? Give some little Lizzie a four weeks' thrill and get us a raft of local space. I worked the first that ever was."

Then if Barney Spark, who shared Glaze's room, turned with a growl and set teeth, Sadie's glance would dissuade him and his typewriter would leap from punches undeserved.

She lost faith in print and the angelic hypostasis of the stars. Last to go—and even then with lively revisits that made her test her own name in the lines of Glaze's fiction—were feminine envies, calling twenty-five-hundred dollars luck and twenty-five exacerbation.

Glaze pegged his hat, drank some water and paid his morning call on Charlie Wayne, Director of Advertising and Publicity, just to help the old boy out with a suggestion or two; but, finding that office empty, he purloined a cigar and invaded other rooms; advised the art manager; straightened out a problem of make-up for the press-sheet editor; gave the trade-advertising man a couple of punch lines; didn't like the current posters—not enough jazz in them; kidded Molly Washburn, who looked after fan magazines; and eventually, in his own den, solved Supernal's financial and production problems from the recesses of a swivel chair. Publicity mattered more than money.

"Trouble with most movie press agents is, they're natural-born plugs," he continued. And at this point he always continued, aloud if one sufferer remained, mentally as a last but equally self-satisfying resort. Particularly did he address the broad back of Barney Spark. Glaze never could see that back except as a vehicle for baggage, pianos or many hods of brick. Unimaginative, stolid, so attuned to the typewriter it hid, from which came no inspired clatter, but slow deliberate taps.

"Worked with hundreds of them. They think newspaper training makes them publicity men, but it don't. They got to have facts. They want to know what happened instead of what might have—instead of grabbing stories out of the ozone. You know—heart-throbs the public eats up, and the city editor's glad of without you weeping on his neck and saying if that story don't get in you'll be fired and you got a sick wife at home. None of that for papa. Never worked for a newspaper in my life. Circus. Carnivals. Shows. But so long as my stenog knows how to juggle commas and kill some of the 'ands' I'll land twice as much as the next best in the infant industry. Know why? Because I'm an idea man. I see things. A spade's a spade but it's buried a lot of treasure. That's me. Hunches. Stunts. Supernal pays for 'em."

"Sure, they pay," Spark grunted without turning, and goaded his machine to trade-paper announcements.

Huh! Any one could write that junk. Sales department and field men supplied some material; Charlie Wayne sketched policy statements; production forecasts came from the studios; all squat, square Barney had to do was to grind down to the hickest of hick exhibitors' understanding, and trade papers published twenty inches of free space for each page of paid advertising. Yup; that poor hack had reached his limit.

Glaze offered inspiration. "Now look at this, f'rinstance." He waved a bundle of bureau clippings Sadie Gordon had presented. "Just in one day, and that much has been landing every day for three weeks all over the country about a woman no one in America has seen. Lookit. 'Famous Continental Star to Appear in Movies Here.' 'Supernal Engages Zara Dubeau, Favorite of Parisian Screen.' Bunk! Paris never even heard of her. But who put that across, Sparky? Who got the idea, thought up the name, sold Supernal on it, and who's going to make her when she comes?"

"Yes, and who's going to find the old pay-envelope just as skinny as ever?" Barney taunted.

"Not for long, my boy; not for long. Watch Milty. One of these days I'm gonna make a star for myself and she'll be sewn up so tight she won't be able to breathe without my permission. Nix on temperamental stuff: balking at stunts, dodging personal appearances and interviews, walking off the lot when a director bawls her out. No, sir! She's gonna jump through my hoop and hand me half her wages every Saturday. Then pipe me, willya, dragging in two thousand bucks a week. And say, if there's any marrying to be done, lil ol' Milty is gonna be *him!*" Leaning forward Glaze rubbed avaricious palms, then cupped his hands. "Please, Heaven, drop a star in here," he prayed.

But for the present, Zara Dubeau beset him. "Oh, Miss Gordon, Sadie, my best-beloved, take a story!" he called.

The girl entered and sat with eyes sternly on her pad while Spark cursed Glaze inaudibly. Sadie, my best-beloved! Clenched fists rested on the keys.

"ACCORDING to a radiogram received by Harry R. Coombes, president of Supernal Pictures," Glaze dictated, "Zara Dubeau the dazzling French beauty who has signed a starring contract with Supernal Pictures and is now rapidly nearing America aboard the *Maravania* which will arrive in New York Thursday—straighten that out and put in the time the *Maravania* gets here—is devoting much of her time to reading scripts which Mr. Coombes instructed Supernal's Paris agents to submit to her for—what's the word?—for perusal en route.

"Le' me see. Coombes twice, Supernal three times in the first paragraph. That'll keep 'em happy. Aw-right. Le's go.

"Arrangements have been made for her reception in New York in style befitting not only her fame but the hospitality of the great American public into whose heart she will win her way and—" *Ad absurdum.*

Milton Glaze worshiped Zara Dubeau as a monument to his own perspicacity. She crystallized an idea seized from air, baptized with ink and offered to Supernal with all his eloquence. Her birth occurred shortly before pay-hour one Friday while Glaze loafed importantly. Fan mail, unread epistles from unknown idolaters, littered a desk. Of late its bulk had shrunk. Glancing through, he discovered that for every request for a photograph Supernal's most famous beauties received, there were three for Bobo's. And Bobo was a chimpanzee. A magazine revealed the same faces—month after month, the same stereotyped interviews, ambitions, gossip, fashions, answers. Not one new idea. He threw it down and returned to the mail with a feeling that his showmanship was challenged.

FOR the first time in history Milton Glaze did not leap upon the cashier halfway down the corridor. He signed and pocketed his pay without looking up from the pad where Zara Dubeau took shape. Sheer inspiration carried him through the presidential cordon.

"It's a pipe, Mr. Coombes. Can't go wrong. Bobo, the chimp, is beating our stars three to one—knocking 'em for a row of extra girls. What does that mean? The fans want novelty, new faces. Where'll we get 'em? Where the heavy-dough boys go every year to look at 'em: Paris!"

Coombes waved him off. "Any star who amounted to anything in Paris would ask a million dollars here; and the only place we see millions is on tablecloths at the Astor."

"You don't get me. Don't chorus girls go from here over there and get billed like Broadway's best? Play it that way. Hire any one, boost her like a Continental knock-out, pay her three hundred and promises, an le' me loose with stunts. Engaged to princes! France's most daring and beautiful spy during the war! Knows where the Russian crown jewels are hidden! I'll have the U. S. thinking Cleopatra's making a personal appearance."

"Too faky," Coombes demurred. "They'd get you."

Drawing his chair forward Glaze prodded the table until the president glared. He was in his element, selling an idea. "Le' me ask you something: When Barnum painted the elephant white, didn't they fall for it? Ain't books been written about it?"

"And there'd be just three lines if the newspapers caught you on this," retorted Coombes, seeking the limit of audacity. "The current was switched on at eleven-fifteen and the press agent pronounced dead twelve minutes later."

Whereupon Glaze grasped the heritage of New York's Broadway-born: the crude, sure slant on mob psychology.

He spoke swiftly. "What are we selling, anyway? Entertainment, something to thrill 'em, make 'em laugh or cry. And as long as the goods are there it don't matter much how we sell 'em. People go to see Charlie Chaplin expecting to laugh. That's half the show. If Chaplin made a rotten picture it would still be good. Now if we tell 'em Zara Dubeau—that's the name I thought of; sounds Frenchy and is easy for exploitation—if we tell 'em loud enough that Zara Dubeau's a dream for looks and wears clothes like a snake wears skin, then build her up with enough story and cast so the show's good even without her, the mob won't care if she comes from Paris, France, or Paris, Illinois. They'll stand in line no matter whether she was a screen star or a high-wire act before. Sa-a-ay, there's another hunch! Get a circus acrobat; in case she turns out too rotten for features, you can use her in serials. But just let me *play* with her."

Afterward, when Paris agents sent film tests of a vivid beauty who moved like an untamed leopard and cajoled with eyes that at the last moment stormed, defying Supernal's reviewers to refuse, Milton's aerial strutting ceased. He discovered he was a fool to have given his idea away. Schlitz Super-Features would have paid a thousand for it.

His portion was the glory of bombarding Barney's back: "And so I said to Coombes: 'Harry, you know me well enough to know I've never steered you wrong. This ain't bunk; it's the sort of showmanship that's put the fillums where they are.' And Coombes said to me, 'Milt, if this goes over you can write your own ticket.' . . . Oh, Sadie, any stills of Dubeau come in yet? No? Gee! If they'd only send some photos I could land them in every rotogravure in the country. Now when I get a star of my own—"

Glaze's vaporings echoed in unexpected places: at night atop the Fifth Avenue bus, diving through waves of light whose crests lapped warmly over Sadie's cheeks; down-front in dim picture houses where Barney Spark forsook the screen for a closer close-up in soft-focus just beside him, and Sadie pretended not to notice; on summer nights in Central Park when pixies danced down moonbeams into Sadie's eyes, or wintry nights when chattering teeth were but the tapping of the leprechaun. If only Barney could have penned his fancies!

And at romantic hours, just before her brownstone cavern swallowed Sadie up.

"I make seventy. We could manage on that." A hopeful prospectus was Barney's love.

"It's not enough in New York, boy; and you—we'll never make more. Glaze says—"

"Hang Glaze! I loathe the faker!"

"Not more than I do. But he has what we haven't. To you and me a spade's a spade, while he sees buried treasure. We'll just go on and on at Supernal until a new boss fires us all. Oh, Barney, why is it? Are we so deep in ourselves that we overlook opportunity in others? That's all this picture business is: exploitation of one another's talent at the right moment. This Zara Dubeau—"

"A rotten swindle!" Spark burst out.

"It isn't, Barney. It's an idea—like putting a fancy wrapper on a loaf of bread. And we're missing those things every day. . . . Oh, smile, boy! Had my photograph taken and Floren's promised them for Thursday. You won't be able to tell me from a movie queen; at least I hope you won't. I'm going to send them home to keep up the—the deception."

THURSDAY scarcely dawned. Night lapsed into murky gray, whelming city crags and drooping in gulches where vague figures crept and blear-eyed street lights lived beyond their hour. Fog pressed down until Manhattan's pride was humbled in the drift and oil of the Hudson's dirty waters; and lest submergence be still incomplete, aimless rain seeped upon Milton Glaze as, armed with a pass, he waited to board the Coast Guard cutter. It ruined the éclat of his derby, flecked shoes and soddened twin collar and shirt—a defiant cleft above his belted overcoat. Only an avalanche could have made him hide that ensign. Alone, sole hero of Supernal's reception committee, Glaze went to meet Zara Dubeau. At eight A. M., shivering among ship-news reporters, customs men and health officers, while the cutter nosed toward Quarantine where the *Maravania* lay, he knew God was against him. Fog became wind and downpour: dismal squalls, then opaque torrents that bounced and seethed on harbor waters.

Glaze condemned all things in heaven above, the earth beneath—and particularly waters that refused to stay under the earth. Here was a deliberate conspiracy to defeat him. On such a day could sky-writers scrawl "Hail, Zara Dubeau" from Staten Island to Times Square? That stunt was off; and no star had had celestial greetings hitherto. Could news photographers shoot society pictures of her sitting cross-legged on the rail, saluting Liberty in France's name; or gangplank snaps wherein some broken-hearted noble said good-by? Would people mill around the wharf to see her? No! America's welcome rested on the band hired to blare "La Marseillaise" as Zara stepped ashore!

All boarded the *Maravania* off Staten Island and after much inquiry had identified Zara Dubeau as the only passenger who had ever successfully combined temperament and *mal-de-mer*, Glaze located her scowling through her stateroom porthole at a world that scowled back. She turned on him a face angered and ravaged by a long, sad trip. Of all the glories film tests had shown, only the eyes remained—two hostile outbursts of a woman fixing blame. When Milt made verbal genuflections, she shrugged; she didn't understand. Nor did he. Seven seasick days would make any woman mad, but at least she might return his greeting. He tried again and this time won a high-pitched, unintelligible torrent and many gestures. Glaze beamed.

"No speaka da Eengleesh?" he asked.

Here was a possibility overlooked, and Zara's personal maid, a harried little soul, who came in just then, confirmed his guess. Mademoiselle spoke no English. So, with the girl as interpreter, Glaze repeated his welcoming address.

"*Ach!*" spat Zara.

NEVER had a star come so unprepared, so unwilling to be prepared. When Milton asked for photographs she offered poses in trapeze tights, but he found no elation that Coombes had taken both ideas. There was space to be stolen; the urgency grew with nearing wharves. He pursued reporters too busy to oblige, and at last caught two midway between a returning ambassador and an English duke. He led them to the Fiery Presence. Two interviews would at least redeem him.

The scared maid repeated their question. Zara fired an answer. The maid seemed confused. Reporters waited. Zara commanded.

"She says," the girl unwillingly translated, "she says she thinks this is the—the rottenest place she was ever in and if she hadn't been a fool she would have stayed at home."

And after Glaze had rushed the reporters out: "You see, sir, she fell in love the day before she left Paris."

Not even the band hurling "La Marseillaise" up from the dock as Zara disembarked, nor its riotous encore from a covered truck as she entered her hotel, could lift Milt's spirits above the drizzle of the day. During the afternoon, however, Zara consented to pose for photographs at Floren's, and the adaptable Floren to expedite them for next morning's papers. Disconsolate, Glaze barked out a column story, with six inches his greatest hope. This Miss Gordon carboned between glances at her own photographs, just from the studio, each important in a cloudy-tissue folder. If still pictures made a movie star, Sadie was one. The lens had peered behind her eyes and snatched arresting imprints.

To each newspaper and photograph syndicate she addressed a large envelope, inserted a story and stacked all on her desk to await rush prints of Miss Dubeau. Having instructed the delivery office, Glaze departed; the staff thinned out. Sadie went with Barney Spark; dinner and a movie afterward. She'd leave her photos behind and mail them out tomorrow. An errand boy dawdled through. Finding envelopes and pictures, he wondered why he should have been kept back when everything was ready. Then he scurried downtown, delivered all, and returned late enough to qualify for dinner money. A package came from Floren's. He shelved it for relay to Mr. Glaze tomorrow. . . .

Riding to work, Sadie Gordon turned the pages of her morning paper. Subway sounds died, massed humanity ceased to be. She felt suddenly alone and hollow. She took no heart in the column story of Zara's arrival, almost word for word as she had edited Glaze's illiteracies.

The accompanying picture was Sadie's. The caption called her Zara Dubeau.

On the street people flowed past noiselessly; her feet were numb against pavements; she reached Supernal in silent panic. Glaze was already there; Barney not yet in—and she needed him. Of all her photographs only three remained. She opened drawers, fumbled over useless things. Mr. Wayne, too concerned to remove his hat, glanced sharply at her, as if to confirm suspicion, dived into his office and rang for Glaze, who obeyed, taking sheets from the morning papers with him. On the way he whipped from Sadie's desk the last three pictures as evidence, and muttered. Inside, Wayne's ultimatum—

"You went over my head on the Dubeau proposition. Now you can take full responsibility for this morning's mess."

Glaze returned with lips drawn into a snarl. The press-sheet editor chuckled audibly. To him not even catastrophe was sacred. Glaze bolted into his room and slammed the door. Barney Spark arrived and spoke quietly over Sadie's shoulder.

"It was in five papers this morning, and the syndicates made dupe negatives last night and have shot out the prints already!"

Symptoms of tragedy mounted at eleven A. M., when Zara Dubeau, reenforced by her maid-interpreter, stormed Harry A. Coombes. She spread a newspaper before him, put an accusing finger on Sadie's picture and voiced soprano protests which the maid translated. Coombes' secretary fled for Glaze, who came clothed in confidence, unshaken by the presidential glare or Zara's anguished tongue. He was not at bay. With thumbs fitted into his waistcoat pockets, Glaze fairly swaggered.

"Well, some showing this morning, eh? How'd the little lady like it?"

"Look!" Coombes slammed his right hand on the sheet; the other swept toward his star. "And look!" he thundered. "Glaze, who is this?"

"My own stenog. And that's the sweetest stunt I ever pulled. Planted her pictures specially. Get the idea? Tomorrow morning we'll land follow-up stories. How does this hit you? New York stenog becomes Parisian beauty for a day. Pictures of Dubeau and this girl side by side. Something to whang every little store clerk and office kid right where she wishes. Human-interest stuff."

"That," said Coombes with emphasis, "is the poorest alibi I ever heard. You're out—through—five minutes from now. And this girl, too. What were you trying to do—sell us *another* star? Wait here!" He turned placatingly to the interpreter. "Tell Miss Dubeau that both are fired and ask her if there's anything else we can do to make her happy."

But Zara's grief was boundless. She was not French, but German. Hate of France, the French and every cedilla of their tongue, shook her voice, her body until Coombes wanted to weep for some director's sake. Supernal had buried her in obloquy. "La Marseillaise" when she arrived! And a French name—Zara Dubeau! *Schwein!* She would not accept. Hers was a famous name written by her family into circus history, a tradition of the Continental trapeze. On this contract—made with Supernal's agents while she appeared in vaudeville in Paris! She would take none other.

"All right! All right! What is it?" Coombes implored.

Her name was Minna Haufhaus.

Purple slowly stained Coombes's face. He saw the name spelled out in large electrics. He rose unsteadily, reached toward Glaze as the root of all evil, and made throaty, sobbing noises. "Out! Out!"

Within fifteen minutes two vacant desks jutted in Supernal's vortex. Glaze had gone defiantly certain of a better job elsewhere; Sadie, philosophically accepting injustice. Screen lightning always struck twice—and errand boys were scarcer than press agents and stenographers. She bade Barney good-by, not knowing just what she would do, to what office she would drift. Barney looked up hopefully. He made seventy; they could manage on that. But Sadie only smiled and patted his arm. He was a dear old kid, yet a one-way street. She left him thoughtfully striking the space bar of his typewriter. Toward noon, a boy presented a staff memorandum, which he read twice perfunctorily, then with deeper interest. By and by he loaded his pipe but forgot to light it, and sat chewing the stem.

THE star-maker had a vision. Perhaps heavy crockery and featherweight cutlery, the lunch check punched at frugal forty cents, his own financial status penciled on the marble-topped table—something over four hundred dollars—and the prospect of an indeterminate sentence to the smell and confusion of cafeteria meals, quickened imagination. That done, they faded; and Glaze sat before Herman Schlitz, of Schlitz Super-Features, refusing thousands for his Continental star. Misfortune, Coombes, and a high-tensioned lady who scorned euphonious Zara Dubeau for dissonant Minna Haufhaus, fulfilled an ambition. Zara Dubeau was his—and she was Sadie Gordon. The supreme idea!

Glaze waited only long enough to check the facts. Day after day, for four weeks, he had heralded Zara Dubeau through every known publicity avenue until trade and public expected her. Oh, blessed Minna, to reject the name! It reverted to Glaze: he owned it. Sadie Gordon's photo had gone out as Zara's. And Sadie, in her bunting, looked the part. Give her a dress—something vampy from a theatrical wardrobe; give her ten words of French and an accent full of z's; give her the name; and sell her to Schlitz. Cheap! Five hundred a week for a quick deal: half for Milty, lil ol' star-maker, Milty.

He paid his check and bustled to the Supernal office. The publicity staff had gone to lunch. Sadie's address was in the card index. He copied it, then ransacked file cabinets for press clippings. Zara's folder bulked. He had not realized there was so much: short stuff and longer nonsense, faked interviews from Paris, pap and hokum. This morning's splendid errors disordered his old desk, just as he had thrown them when Coombes had called.

Three photographs of Sadie lay underneath. He took these, too. And the stunt list scheduled for Zara's glorification. They were his ideas, anyway.

Then he passed from empty stall to empty stall and pitied dumb, driven cattle. The trouble with most movie press agents was, they were natural-born hacks. They couldn't see farther than next Friday's pay. Pay? Wages? His foot was on that implement which others called a spade.

Glaze perfected campaign details at the corner of Broadway and Forty-fifth Street. He could plot here. Billboards, gaunt ribs of electric signs, people rushing to earn or streaming to spend, brash jargon in his ears, and himself reflected by a drug-store window—a thinker's seat. It was foolish, he decided, to rush Schlitz with the proposition. Five hundred a week could be one thousand just as easily, with a little preliminary promotion to make others aid her sale.

Stepping closer to the window, he examined its display: face creams, True-Shape-Keeps-You-Trim, cosmetics, toilet requisites, "Poff!" Removes Hair, Polarno for Lustrous Locks. Opportunity fawned. He glanced overhead: Bloburg, Music Publisher. And he knew Bloburg from way-back—plugged songs together.

In exactly two minutes Glaze had blustered into Bloburg's presence.

"I'm not asking you to do something for me, Blo. I'm offering you something you can't afford to pass up. For nothing—no royalties, no anything—just because I want to see you get ahead. Here's this Zara Dubeau, the great new French star. Lookit!" He thrust a photograph under Bloburg's long nose. "A whiz, I'll say! Everybody's been reading about her for weeks. Here's just some of her advance notices, and there's ten times more back in the office. Now get this! Dedicate a song to her—a jazzy number. Le's think of a title. Yup—'Oh, Zara Dubeau, Don't Say No.' Howzat?"

Mr. Bloburg had little time to consider. Glaze overwhelmed him.

"Get out a snappy cover with her pitcher on it—big. I'll give you a letter from her saying she'd sooner dance to that number than anything she's heard. Then as fast as we get bookings on her fillums, we give you the dates and you put pluggers into the theaters and slam the local music stores so hard they'll think you're the only publisher on Tin Pan Alley." Envy throbbed quickly in his voice. "Blo, I wish I had your chance!" he cried.

"I been stung once," said Mr. Bloburg.

Now sorrow flooded Glaze. He was the family physician diagnosing a neglected case. "Why? Ask me, and I'll tell you why. Because you let some little punk sell you a tie-up on a pitcher and a star that never had a dog's hope with the public. If you'd asked me I could have given you the low-down and saved your jack. Bet you didn't sell a thousand copies. But this is big, sure-fire. The public wants it. Sa-a-ay! Tell you what you do. Use the old melody and write in a new lyric. I'll compose it myself. Won't cost you a cent."

"No royalties? No mechanicals?"

"No nothing. I just want the publicity for Zara." With photographs and cuttings already under his arm, Glaze reached for Bloburg's hand. "Thanks, old-timer! Bring you the lyric and letter tomorrow and we'll sign contracts then. You'll clean up. Oh, le's have your phone book a minute. Want to find some addresses."

"And maybe I'll meet the little lady?" Bloburg hoped as Milt departed.

Sure! Milt could fix that. Simple!

THE wilting individual who leaned against the wall of a Brooklyn candy factory at seven o'clock that night, finding shadows cool and ready to embrace him in sleep, was Milton Glaze. He could have fallen there without much further ruin of clothes already baggy from exertion and a derby no longer cocked, but all askew. He was like a man just risen after forcible ejection; whereas he had walked through the door—that weather-beaten old factory entrance a few yards away—as through a triumphal arch.

Run himself ragged, tha's all. Phew! Had to rest up somewheres. One wild afternoon, he'd say, with a grand finale among the chocolate-dippers. Harrison, the printer, steered him—Harrison printed miniature packet-cards of movie stars and sold them in million lots to cigarette and biscuit manufacturers. Get a complete set of fifty and they'd give you an album to stick 'em in. Yup! Just landed Zara Dubeau on the list for cards and four-color calendars that butcher shops gave out, when Harrison tipped him off. Then what'd he do? Hot-footed to Brooklyn, right up to high-chief candy-shooter, talked him silly and sold him. New candy bar. "Bar o' Zara." Five-cent line, pitcher of Dubeau with every packet. Zowie! Newspaper ads, window streamers, show cards—the whole works. National distribution. They pay for everything. Howzat for a wow? Better go home and starch up before seeing Schlitz.

Millions dizzied Glaze when he reckoned the afternoon's achievement. The song, a million copies—well, maybe. Harrison's cards and calendars, a million sure; he figured two. "Bar o' Zara" defied his estimates, but all New York would see it advertised. Six millions here alone. And in addition he had placed two face-cream testimonials and a dental cream indorsement; promised True-Shape-Keeps-You-Thin life-size figures in a bathing-suit for window work; and arranged the Zara Dubeau Fashion Show at Roxon's department store, with half-page announcements guaranteed. Glaze called this merchandising.

Sitting on the edge of his bed, close-pressed by slovenly furnishings of a "professional" hotel, he raised Zara's salary to fifteen hundred dollars. "And I'll bet she's at home reading the want ads," he sneered.

Sadie, as a human entity possessed of mind and understanding, figured so slightly in his dispositions, and yet Sadie, as a shadow in mute screen parade, divided his profits. He grew resentful. Fifty-fifty seemed inequitable. Readjustment gave him one thousand dollars and Sadie half that sum. In better mood he telephoned to Schlitz.

Luck stayed with him. He found Herman Schlitz at home and willing to be seen if the proposition could not wait. Glaze took a taxi, dreamed splendidly for all its lurching, and found stuff of dreams in a vertical checkerboard of orange windows and unseen brick; in the arcaded entrance—an assault of domes and monoliths aglare with gilt—through which a panoplied centurion marched him; and, as he shot sky-high to the Schlitz demesne, in the elevator burnished and plushed for the gasconading rich.

Glaze sighed, "I knew him when."

The art director of Schlitz Super-features had invested his president's abode with practised magnificence and camera eye. Somehow the millionaire set had flown from the studio prop-room and fallen here, intact but transformed from plaster, shoddy and varnished pine to marble, Bokharas and ponderous mahogany; and grim, silent John D. Rochefort, scheming a corner in wheat, was pudgy little Herman Schlitz, in shirt-sleeves, playing solitaire.

"I s'pose you come up here looking for a job," he said, still turning cards. "If you have, you don't get it. I'm full up. One more and I'd bust."

Glaze spread himself. "I don't have to look for a job."

"Well, if you gone into the production business you soon will. What you got?"

"What do you want?" Glaze countered.

SCHLITZ put down the last card. "You're selling me. I ain't selling you," he complained.

"Right! Then le' me ask you something: What's a star worth these days?"

"To herself, maybe one thousand, maybe ten thousand. To me—nothing but overdrafts. What you standing up for? Sit down."

Glaze dragged forward a throne and emptied on the table his folder of press clippings. "Seen these?" he inquired, pushing a batch at Schlitz, then displaying his last photograph of Sadie. "Have you met her yet?"

Schlitz gave one skimming glance. "Never seen her, never heard of her."

"Sure, no! Nobody has. If I offered you Charlie Chaplin you'd say, 'What does *he* do?"

"Maybe," Schlitz admitted. "But what's that got to do by Zara Dubeau?"

"Nothing—only she's likely to walk out on Supernal any time I say the word, after somebody says the word to me. Listen, Mr. Schlitz. . . ."

Mr. Schlitz listened. He became Herman half-way through the discourse, Hymie near the end. Glaze attacked skilfully. This was the moment for Schlitz Super-Features to cash in on all Supernal's effort, to steal Supernal's thunder, to annex Supernal's star imported and advertised at Supernal's expense. Song, tie-ups, fashion show, "Bar o' Zara," all went where Zara

Dubeau went. And was she the goods? Well, did hard-boiled Harry Coombes ever book before he looked?

His eyes set on Schlitz's face as he talked, talked down-turned lips of opposition into half-open cupidity; and behind his eyes Glaze smiled to see the other lean farther across the table, chin almost resting on folded hands. Schlitz was a sucker after all. Glaze painted trade scoops, made a target of the magnate's vanity.

His peroration left Schlitz silent, sprawled far back now. A gilded table-clock ticked endlessly; grew raucous, then funereal, solemn against hope. Glaze fidgeted. A sense of failure began to unnerve him.

"Hymie, don't you see what—"

But Schlitz motioned for quiet, and after two eternal minutes wherein he watched Glaze droop: "I don't think so much of it."

"But Hymie—"

Again Schlitz grilled with silence, until Glaze could endure no longer.

"You can have her for twelve hundred dollars," he burst out.

"M-m-m!" Schlitz considered leisurely. "And after I paid her, what would I use for money?"

Glaze dropped. "A thousand."

"I'm still laughing at you."

"Seven-fifty. You can't expect a star to be happy on less."

"Got a pen?" Schlitz asked. What a sucker was this man Glaze! "Write me out an option. Twenty-four hours. I want to read up on her."

WALKING home, Milton Glaze discovered life still worth while. Two-thirds of seven hundred and fifty dollars gave him five hundred. Whereupon he finished the journey in a taxi, but, at his hotel, decided to complete the whole venture in a day. This appealed to pride; was something to talk about afterward; all on unlucky Friday, too. He told the chauffeur Sadie Gordon's address and started far uptown, not expecting to arrive before half-past eleven. Pretty late. Time could not matter to a stenographer attaining stardom, however. Pretty soft. His mind dawdled in retrospect and planed ahead. Funny, wasn't it, that he should have singled her out on Forty-fifth the other morning, picked her instantly as star material? That wasn't showmanship but—but artistic conception. It proved him to be more than press agent, or producer as his new title would be. "Milton Glaze presents Zara Dubeau." See Supernal's eyes pop open. But he was more than these things: a practical visionary. Good line, that. His press agent must use it under a cut of Milton Glaze, eyeing eternity from beneath a large down-drawn felt hat. Along upper Broadway he slept utterly and only awakened when the taxi-driver asked three dollars fare.

He found himself before a desolate house, with high, worn stoop lifting to the door that showed a card: Back Room to Let. Noisome garbage cans stood sentinel down a street choked with dreary, lived-in odors, and palisaded with barren windows to bespeak respectability. All good roomers were in bed. Few but street lights glimmered.

"Behold," he scoffed, "the birthplace of the stars."

Pulling the bell, he set the house ajangle. Long afterward the door crept open a few inches, and a thin face peered.

"The room's taken," the proprietress grumbled, and made to shut the door. Glaze inserted his foot.

"Who's asking for a room?" he demanded. "I want to see Sadie Gordon."

"Nice time to come! She's left—and stop pushing this door."

"She's—what?"

"Left—quit—gone—don't live here." To be rid of Glaze, the woman fired out information. "She come in this afternoon, took her things and went. Don't know where; didn't leave no forwarding address for her mail. She never got none, anyhow. All went to the office, she said. Never told me good-by; just paid me, packed her bags and sneaked. Very uppish! Very persnickety! And if you want to know any more ask the police!" *Slam!*

GLAZE spent a desperate Saturday. Complete, baffling was Sadie's disappearance. Supernal could give no information and Barney Spark, sure fount of intelligence, was away at the studio getting production notes. Five times Glaze telephoned without result, and when the sixth call won no answer at all, his hopes sank lower and he raged around his room wondering by what merit Supernal's publicity staff deserved Saturday afternoon off. He made another useless excursion uptown. Sadie might have returned for something left behind. Instead, the landlady assailed him with suspicions. Even matinée crowds were watched. A dramatic impulse pictured her homeless, matching purse with menus on cheap restaurant windows, or seeking quarters more woebegone than those vacated, the while fame sought her. But with emotions more vindictive, he railed at the perversity of womankind and mentally forged contractual chains which would hobble forever his wandering star if—no, when he found her. By virtue of effacement Sadie, the unconsidered subject, became an omnipotence driving him to seek a miracle among Broadway hordes. He knew it couldn't happen. And it didn't. Despondently he returned home and from his tenth-floor window saw white night rout day from the world below.

Broadway dawned with a hundred suns whose rays volleyed and latticed, revolved and splintered overhead in iridescent haze. Sound, winnowed of charivari into remote diapason, rose from the tuning-fork of two debouching streets—one prong stretched to the Circle's white horizon; Seventh Avenue lost ere Central Park. Names blazed, snuffed out, and blazed again: somebody's auto, somebody's candy, somebody's show—somebody's hunch, stunt, idea. Their wide mouths opened in the sky and laughed at Glaze. He flung up the window, leaned far out and filled his nostrils with his native air: mist, eddies of trumpery, smell of money to burn. Slowly he drew back and surveyed his room, its fading walls, old carpet stained and pock-marked by cigarettes, dressing table and bureau ringed with wet glasses, a theadbare bed. In the mirror he saw the star-maker, who grabbed things out of air, but now mouthed uselessly when Glaze prayed, "Gi' me a stunt—just one more hunch."

He removed his coat and sat at the bureau scratching a pad. Cigarette after cigarette became a butt to litter the floor. He wrote spasmodically, studied his work, then crumpled the sheets and recommenced after distressing intervals. At last he wrote:

> Have death threats aimed at Zara Dubeau, the famous Continental screen actress, before she left Paris, been fulfilled in New York? The mysterious disappearance of the movie star from her hotel –

No good. Sadie had not registered at a hotel and the uptown address was impossible. More thought, then the telephone. If that ring were only Sadie's! He started up. It might be. He had strewn hurry calls in every likely quarter. Half buoyed, he answered.

"Is this Mr. Glaze? . . . Well, this is Mr. Bloburg. . . . Yeah. Blo. You never brought the lyric in this morning—that number for Zara Dubeau."

Glaze moaned inwardly. "On Monday, Blo. Been rushed to death. You understand how it is. . . . Yup, Monday, sure."

"Oh, that's all right! . . . Say, Milt, we got a party to our house tonight and I was wondering could you bring the little lady up."

"Blo," Glaze said from his heart, "if I could—I would."

He wrote again, feverishly, tie and collar discarded, sleeves rolled.

> Zara Dubeau, the famous Continental actress who arrived in New York Thursday under one of the biggest motion picture contracts in screen history, has disappeared in circumstances which point to fulfilment of threats made shortly before she left Paris. Rumored to know the whereabouts of the Russian Crown Jewels, Mademoiselle Dubeau has been the target of an international gang seeking to extort her secret. According to information which Milton Glaze, her American representative, supplied to the New York police—

Police balked him. Better keep away. No press agent dared hoax them since they had dragged Central Park lake for "a Japanese princess who drowned herself after an American naval officer had jilted her." A good stunt, even though not his; but the District Attorney hadn't liked it.

He attended angrily when the telephone rang again. Now Herman Schlitz beset him.

"Yes, this is Hymie. Well, I been reading up on Zara Dubeau. Not in our papers, though. That bunk don't sell me none. But I been looking through the Paris papers"—Glaze thought darkly of all those journals had not said, but Schlitz sailed on—"and every line I see there says, 'Hymie, you should grab this star.' And ain't I got her! I take my option for seven hundred and fifty—cheap. But don't try and hold me up because I said so, because I'll get you if you don't come through."

"Who said I wouldn't come through?"

"Nobody. I said 'if,' and 'if' ain't 'is.' Only I just had a hunch a certain wise-guy press agent wouldn't like to know he been caught by a bluff."

A twisted smile fled over Glaze's face. He sank amid crumpled sheets, beat his temples and swore uselessly at Sadie's photograph. It pitied him. Mechanically he scrawled another page; maudlin, uncontrolled words spilled out as his eye followed lines from the evening paper: "King summons Zara Dubeau as England's Premier—Fistic News and Gossip by Sadie Gordon—Great Sale! 4,500 Yards of 39-Inch Sadie Gordons—Help Wanted: Star to Cook—Lost and Found—"

His pencil jumped. He printed:

$1000 REWARD
for information as to the
whereabouts of
ZARA DUBEAU
Famous Continental Screen Star
Mysteriously Vanished in New York
Reply to—
Milton Glaze, Hotel Tenelba, Broadway.

"That's it." He whispered lest the words be scared away. "A wow! The—super-stunt. Three thousand one-sheets sniped all over town with Sadie's pitcher on 'em—big. She'll see it and come a-runnin'." He held the paper at arm's length envisaging block type and startling red. "On every fence," he breathed as to a sacred thing. "Garbage cans. Store-windows. . . . New York'll turn itself inside out—looking for her and easy money. . . . Yup, try and—get it."

He penciled again. Figures now. Posting—$180. Cut and printing—$100. He'd gamble that and make Sadie pay. The woman pays. Horace Greeley's line, wasn't it?

Jeering back at Broadway's names—inelastic, all tied to one worn-out idea—he hurried to a theatrical printer and engraver who worked all night and much of Sunday to produce three thousand posters in red-orange, dominated by the face of Sadie Gordon. With these a sniping squad assailed New York on Sunday night until every vantage point echoed the alarm. . . .

"THE trouble with most movie press agents is, they're natural-born hacks. They don't see things. Now take me, f'rinstance. I'm an idea man. I see things, grab 'em out of the air. Hunches: that's me. Supernal pays for 'em. And this one could be worth a thousand dollars extra."

The intonation was unmistakably Glaze's but the mouth was the mouth of Barney Spark. They sat in the Tenelba's lounge, quite late on Monday evening, Glaze, Spark and Sadie Gordon, who sheltered behind Barney's shoulder.

"Don't get you," the star-maker snapped, biting his thumb nail.

A day of fruitless clues and doubting, querulous calls from Herman Schlitz had frayed his nerves; nor was there joy at Sadie's reappearance under Barney's guard. They seemed to ridicule him; Spark with his acquired patter, Sadie with sloe-eyes, and lips turned whimsically.

"What's eating you?" barked Glaze.

"Ideas. And who got this idea, Milty? Who sold Supernal on it and—"

"You never had one in your life."

"Well, life's not so long. Now le' me tell you something." Barney leaned forward in Glaze's confidential style. "Last Friday, just around noon, the first Zara Dubeau—Minna Something-or-other—tore up her contract and walked out. She went back to Paris. And I hated to see all that publicity go to waste, so I got an idea. New one, never been used before. Yes, sir. Grabbed it out of the ozone, sold Supernal on it and Sadie's been Zara Dubeau ever since. Coombes started her at the studio today. Nix on temperamental stuff, balking at stunts, dodging personal appearances. And if there's any marrying to be done—now le' me whisper *this*—she's got to divorce me first."

Glaze shot up. "It's a rotten fake."

"If we tell 'em loud enough," Barney soothed, "that Zara Dubeau's a dream for looks and wears clothes like a snake wears skin, then build her up with enough story and cast so the show's good even without her, the mob won't care if she comes from Paris, France, or Paris, Illinois."

"Mr. Glaze," asked Sadie very solemnly, "you weren't trying to put over the same idea, were you?"

A page came droning through the lounge. "Mis-ter Glaze. Mis-ter Glaze. Herman Schlitz calling Mis-ter Glaze."

The next story of Milton Glaze, Barnum of the movies, will be "Lulu —She Steals the Show," in February EVERYBODY'S, out January 15.

The Shah Is Dead: Checkmate

Oil Intrigue in Persia, and a "Native" Who Wins His Life at a Game of Chess

By Ellis O. Briggs

Illustration by Joseph A. Maturo

IT SHOULD be understood at the beginning that a Colonial Englishman is a charming and companionable fellow—until you touch him on the Empire. Then he suddenly loses his sense of humor and becomes an aggressive, irascible conqueror.

Major Humbertson was commissioner for the British Colonial Oil Company, with headquarters in Dizfoul, Persia. He had no means of knowing that I was an American or, more pointedly, the same American whom he had entertained at his house in Bagdad a few months after the Mudros armistice. That was several years ago and my visit was notable because of two things and two only: I beat Major Humbertson at chess and I fell in love with Clara, his gray-eyed daughter.

Today the British major had appeared in his immaculate uniform and testified to the doings of a Kurdish peasant in the plateau district near Dizfoul, not far from certain oil shafts being sunk under. his direction. The descendants of Xerxes, acting on his testimony, announced that on the morrow the Kurdish peasant would start on a long journey to Nishapur—there to sweat in the government salt mines for a period of ten years.

I was that Kurdish peasant.

Many months in the land as an oil prospector cut me off from any outward resemblance to the West. I willed it so, for if the English had known what I was doing in their sphere of influence I would have been escorted out of the territory long ago. The Persians sentenced me as a subject of the Shah, as a thievish nomad who trespassed on the land reserved for the oil company.

An old soldier brought in my supper: goats' milk cheese, ripe olives so soft they resembled tiny boiled prunes, a round loaf of bread and a bottle of raki. I paid the man in silver crans. For several minutes he observed me in silence while I ate. Then:

"Allah is all-seeing," he said. "Why have you done this thing, brother? Why have you stolen from *them*, who are strong and evil and will some day be struck by the bolts of lightning?" It was evident my jailer referred to the British in Persia.

"Allah strikes when He is ready," I sighed. "Perhaps, master, the day cometh. Will you break bread with a dying man?"

"No soul dieth but by the permission of Heaven, as it is written and preordained," he said. "You have heard of the plague at the salt mines? The sickness which burns and marks the body with purple spots as when blood dries on the sands of the desert? You have heard? Yea, that is why you call yourself a dying man— But do not despair."

There was a spark in the ancient eyes which I was at a loss to explain. I could guess that his feelings were all with me, a True Believer—so he thought!—rather than with the representative of the British Colonial Oil Company.

"Will the men of Dizfoul send to a miserable death in the mines one whose only fault is a fault with which they have sympathy?" My eyes tried to probe the soldier's mind.

"No soul dieth but by the permission—"

"Listen, master," I interrupted. "Do you desire gold above all else in this life?"

"I am old and my wants are few," was the discouraging reply. He moved away. "The British *Bimbashi* comes soon—tonight—to speak to you. May there be upon your tongue crafty sayings with which to confound the unspeakable infidel!" He spat on the floor.

I heard the heavy bolts slide to.

My predicament was sufficiently alarming, so there was no need of the realization that it was brought about by my own unique and romantic stupidity to add texture to my gloom. The one and only reason I came within fifty miles of Dizfoul was—Clara. A week ago I completed my secret survey of the province of Arabistan and was ready to proceed to Tabriz with my report. Although the British technically controlled the region, I knew my American employers were working night and day to break down the old agreements which gave the Empire the exclusive rights for economic exploitation. Once my report was in the hands of our vice-consul at Tabriz, I planned a long vacation. I could then have traveled to Dizfoul, or anywhere else for that matter, without the necessity either of dressing like a Kurd or acting like a Shiite Mussulman. The difference in time would have amounted to something over a month.

So I sent my report by a messenger and rode south for one more look at Dizfoul. I had not seen an American or an Anglo-Saxon for five months. It was not that I had any wild idea of laying aside my ragged garments, like the hero of an impossible novel, and advertising myself as a marriageable candidate from the American commonwealth across the Atlantic—nothing of the sort! When I saw Clara last our affairs were not terminated exactly; she laughed at me (perhaps not without reason), and I departed in considerable irritation.

Now I wanted to have but a glimpse of her slim figure; to see her, poised on her Arab horse, galloping down to the murky little Dizfoul bazaars from the Company compound outside the city walls; to look at Clara again and to depart as I came, unannounced and unobserved. But I wanted to see her!

In my enthusiasm I forgot the caution which served me so well in my travels through the British mandated territory. I ventured too close to the oil wells. I was arrested, promptly tried—and here I sat, in the miserable pink plaster jail, waiting the coming of dawn to begin my journey to the salt mines of Nishapur. Naturally I had no more intention of being thus summarily shipped off to a region infected with typhus than a Levantine in Constantinople has of being honest.

THERE was the sound of hoofs on the dry cobbles below my barred window. The door swung open again and the same soldier carried in a kerosene lamp which he placed on the window sill. He gave the English officer a venomous glare, and me a brief glance the purport of which I did not fathom. It seemed to say, "Be of good cheer, for Allah is with you."

Major Humbertson was past fifty. He was erect, well built, and marked above the ears with stiff gray hairs among the brown ones. I touched my forehead, then made the gesture of tossing dust on my turban. For a few minutes he completely ignored me, chewing the inside of his lip and twisting his thumb at the edge of his polished belt.

"I suppose the Russians employed you to spy on us," he began loudly, in Persian. It was a statement which anticipated no denial—sharp and unbending.

"What shall a wretched man answer? Your Excellency has already decided," I remarked humbly.

The major snorted. There was a long silence, and he never took his pale blue eyes from my bowed figure. Through the evening calm I heard the song of a nightingale from a garden near by. The smell of hot camels drifted past the building.

"I have examined the instruments you carried. They are of Russian make."

"Then your Excellency is aware of the fact that I did not steal them?"

"I knew that before they found you guilty," the officer admitted. He seemed perplexed. His thumb toyed incessantly with his belt, close to the holster.

"You come here to tell me that! To say that I am sentenced for something I did not do?" I raised my head.

A careless grunt from the major. "That charge—or another! You were spying on our territory. That is ample to sentence you."

I wondered what would happen if I made a quick dash at him. Would the soldier outside the closed door choose to be deaf to the sound of a struggle?

"This territory is ours," he continued. The blue eyes narrowed. "In exchange for certain information about your employers, I might be able to shorten your sentence."

"In exchange for certain information! The great *Ferengi* officer is generous! But what information could a despicable Kurdish peasant possess which your Excellency desires?" I was marking time, trying to draw him out.

"Peasant be damned!" I heard the major mutter in English. "Not with those Russian tools.

"Are you anxious to start for Nishapur in the morning?" he demanded, in Persian. "To spend ten years in the salt mines?"

"I am not anxious to remain there five years, either, your Excellency," I reminded him.

"Five is better than ten!"

"Under some conditions." I held up my hand, between the thumb and forefinger of which I pretended to hold a gray insect captive. The click of my finger nails made a sound we both could hear. "My life at Nishapur would not endure till next harvest. One year, five years, ten years are all alike to me there, *Ghazi Bimbashi!* Do you not know that *this*—carries typhus?"

I saw the Englishman shudder and the knuckles of his hand grew white as his fingers bit into his palm.

"Yes," I went on softly. "I have heard of the plague at Nishapur. The purple, spotted plague—that thrives on the dampness—and vermin."

Major Humbertson turned away, his smooth cheeks drawn with disgust and involuntary loathing of the fate I twisted before him.

"You will gain nothing by leaving in anger, your Excellency."

"No?" he questioned, over his shoulder. Possibly my own voice did not sound so abject as it was on his entry.

"Perhaps, after all—there is information which might be of value to you—"

A flicker of triumph in the major's eyes. He believed he had judged his man; on the contrary, I had judged the officer.

"What assurance can a helpless prisoner have that you will deal fairly?" I asked. "That your word, given to me here—alone—will not be broken?"

The attitude of the man was bellicose. For a second I thought he would strike me. I rocked on the balls of my feet, prepared to dodge with an animation which would have surprised him.

"Because when I give my word, it is never broken!"

How like a Britisher! It was true; I doubted him not for an instant. His promise, given like that, would be carried out to the last drop of blood in his veins. I knew—because I was of the West; because I knew Englishmen; because I was not what he thought me. But to offer such a promise as collateral for personal safety, to a man whom he believed to be an Oriental, showed the lack of any fundamental knowledge of the people with whom he dealt, day in and day out.

"AND the ten years' imprisonment?" I inquired.

"I will commute it to three," he replied shortly.

"In that case," I said, "your Excellency will have to agree to something further."

"You doubt my word!" The thought of such a thing generated a storm of menacing anger.

"In my position," I answered, "it would be strange if I did not doubt you. But no! As it happens, I believe you. Listen to me, your Excellency. There is a thing which they have told me about you, and this thing interests me above most. It is that you play very often the game they call in the West, chess. Do I speak the truth?"

Again I perceived the marks of astonishment. "Russian! I thought so!" he whispered. "What of that?" he asked me.

"I, too, am fond of that game, major. Will you play against me, tonight?"

"To what purpose?"

I took my time about replying because I wished to give Major Humbertson ample time to think. Chess was the man's hobby, second only to the affection he bore for his daughter Clara. Chess was more than his hobby; he spent half his leisure hours in trying to work out its problems. And in the

East, because he knew it would reduce his prestige, he did not play against the natives. Nevertheless, he craved the game, and his desire to find an opponent was usually futile. This much I learned when I was in Bagdad, his guest, before the English placed Feisal on the throne of Irak.

Also, the major obviously thought I could put him in possession of much valuable information. Perhaps our Slavic neighbors north of the Caspian Sea had been stirring things up of late. No news had reached me since I left Teheran in January, five months ago. Major Humbertson supposed otherwise.

"To what purpose?" he repeated, in a tone slightly altered.

I spoke slowly, for if I lost the bait I dangled before the major, the chances were that I would start for Nishapur in the morning.

"Your Excellency, you have decided that I am not an ordinary Kurdish peasant, as these ragged garments of mine would indicate. I admit nothing—but freedom is precious to me. If I play you a game of chess—and lose—I shall tell you who I am—and what I was doing in Dizfoul—and go to the salt mines tomorrow!" I met the blue eyes squarely. "But should I win this game, you will secure my release; I will tell you nothing!"

In the pause I could feel the velvety softness of the night about us, close-wrapping the city. Dizfoul is at the edge of the Arabistan plain, with the Ab-i-Diz River draining south and west to the Persian Gulf. Above us—the Kara Koush Mountains, stretching gaunt and brown to peaks nine thousand feet higher than the sea; below—the valleys, tilled in primitive fashion for centuries; and under the earth lay the oil, which Russian, English and American coveted.

Oil: it is an insignificant word. But because of oil, nations of the West threatened to fly at one another's throats. Coal, iron, oil—and the latest and greatest is the last. Out of the fields of Persia would come fuel to drive the turbines of the battleships flying the Union Jack. Polished motorcars, sliding through the twilight on the wide Champs-Elysées, would be moved by the petrol from these Arabistan wells. Airplanes, racing over the continent of Europe, would pulse with the liquid from Persia.

"Chess," remarked the British major, only half aloud. His thoughts flowed on. It was a double temptation I offered. Added to the longing to engage in a game was the feeling that he could readily beat me. Was I a spy of the Russians? If he defeated me, he would learn; if he lost, the secret would still be mine. A sporting proposal—so Major Humbertson imagined!

I found myself wondering what I would do if he refused to play. Attack him? That might not be so difficult since my cringing attitude had rendered the man careless. Attack Clara's father? Never! He must engage in this single encounter. The chance of seeing her was worth the risk I was running.

Out came the inevitable British pipe.

"State your bargain!"

"It is this, your Excellency: we shall play, here in the prison. If I lose, it shall be as I said. I shall go to Nishapur, without further protest. But if I win I shall sleep tonight under your protection, at the post of the Dizfoul Commissioner; I shall sleep as a guest, without being shackled. Then, in the morning, I shall receive the camel you confiscated, together with my tools of Russian make and a safe conduct which will allow me to pass through Arabistan to the frontier of Irak. That is my bargain."

Major Humbertson covered my shabby, bent figure with his eyes. "You wish to sleep—under my roof!" he exclaimed.

I nodded. "Yes, your Excellency—if I win. Why should I be freed from the prison if it is only to be killed by a Persian vagabond in the dark streets of Dizfoul? Besides, I have enemies here. My life must be assured me—if I win." My enemies and my risk in a night-time Dizfoul were imaginary, but I relied on the major's suspicion that I was a Russian, and hence liable to assault by the natives who loved the Slavs no better than the British, to counteract his own knowledge of the safety of life in the city. I clicked my finger nails as I had done once before this evening. "You will forget that gesture, Major Humbertson. I am as free from the plague-carrying vermin as you are. It will be no disgrace to you if I enter your gates; no shame to the *Ferengi Bimbashi.*"

A hard smile edged the officer's lips. "If

I win—if I lose": the motif was getting on his nerves. To his mind there would be but one conclusion to our chess game.

"I give you my word! In half an hour I will return with my chessboard."

The bolts slid across the door. I got up, stretching my body to ease the cramps which my subservient position engendered. I felt as stiff, all at once, as a varnished caterpillar. Then I poured myself a drink of raki. The major was hooked: it was up to me, an American prospector, to land him. And if I conquered the officer I would see Clara—and depart, as agreed, in the morning.

As I watched the clamp of Major Humbertson's teeth on the stem of his pipe, and the frown that creased his forehead, I asked myself if he realized that chess originated in the land of the Shahs—that its very title is derived from that word. When I made this observation he only grunted, cursing the Persian monopoly matches that fizzed and went black before he could get his pipe half lighted.

Not for nothing had I played in the years I spent in Persia—in Isfahan, Tabriz, Hamadan, Bendar Abbas and Teheran. The old bearded mullahs would make any student of the game sit up and take notice. And my father was considered no bungling amateur, either. The major was skilful, but not brilliant. He was exact, thoughtful and as impenetrable as an undiscovered tomb: a servant of the Empire, giving much, receiving little, working apart from the "natives" in a country he despised, saving his meager salary against the end of his days, back in England.

I wanted to ask about Clara. But her father's brow was wrinkled, his forehead damp, as he stared at the checkered board. And he was the man who stood for—what? The Empire! An empty idea? At his nod the lawless tribesmen of the mountains came down, meekly to give ear to his bidding. He represented that idea. To the Persians he *was* the British Empire.

The fifteenth move: my bishop took a pawn. His frown deepened and he began to look more than his age. I felt my concentration relax. Whatever Major Humbertson did, I would win in five moves. I felt almost sorry for the man.

"*Shah mat,*" I would triumphantly say. "The Shah is dead." In English, "Checkmate."

It might have been entertaining to remark, "Your goose is cooked, old fellow!" I was in process of deciding that it was not worth the price to see him fairly leap out of his uniform at the sound of an English sentence, when something happened which took my mind completely off the chess game.

The window was closed and there should have been no draft in the room—yet the flame of the lamp jumped sideways and the shadows on the ceiling suddenly flickered. I turned my eyes to the door. It was open.

Crouched behind Major Humbertson, his dark eyes shining with fanatical hatred, was the old soldier who brought in my supper. His arm went up and back.

The table upset with a crash, scattering the few remaining chessmen in every direction. My fingers closed about a hard, bony wrist and on my cheek I felt hot breath. Up went my knee, taking the Major's assailant in the pit of the stomach. The steel, no longer polished, but dripping red at the point, slipped out of the soldier's grasp. A heavy groan told of his deflated Persian diaphragm as I carried the man to the door, slamming it behind him.

Major Humbertson was standing, close to the lamp. One arm was thrown across his chest, the fingers clutching the shoulder. In his other hand was a service revolver. As I looked, bright drops appeared between his fingers, running down the side of his jacket. The gun dropped into his holster as I stooped for the soiled blade at my feet, offering it, hilt toward him.

"I believe it is the will of Allah that I remain your prisoner a little longer," I said.

He accepted the dagger. The dark discoloration extended more than two inches above the point. A blow aimed for the base of the neck, deflected to the shoulder by my tardy interference. When his hand came away a shower of drops followed the swing of his arm. All the color went out of his cheeks and the officer swayed, like a willow branch in the gentlest of May breezes.

Then I heard his polished boots thump together. The power accumulated during many generations of hardy, adventurous men, shone from his eyes.

"Why did you do it? He would have killed me!"

I sprang to his side, easing the big body into a chair.

"Get the chessboard," he commanded. "No, no! Do not get it! Let me think—think—think." His hand clutched the skin of his forehead. "So you saved my life—to give yourself—the pleasure of seeing me—*beaten!* You had me beaten. The game was yours." His head tilted back and he stared at me, his mouth working over the syllables. "You damned fool, he would have killed me in another second! . . . *You are no Persian!*"

WITH the dagger I cut open his shirt and the underwear beneath it. The wound was small, gaping like the bud of a crimson tulip that needs but a few hours of sunlight to bring forth the blossom. The point struck the flat shoulder bone, shearing the muscles—coming out cleanly. His skin was clear white, with twin streams running down his back.

When I finished, Major Humbertson reached forward, pulling himself erect by his good arm, the hand closed about a bar across the window.

"My word—the word of a British officer—is not broken! You will sleep tonight at the post of the Dizfoul Commissioner."

Outside the prison a drowsy batman held his horse, a white Arab mare.

"Give this man your mount, Barouir," muttered the major. "You will follow us on foot."

A Persian sentry came to present arms, his carbine strap clicking. An idea: the Empire of Britain.

In twenty minutes we left the Dizfoul walls. At the top of a knoll, a quarter of a mile beyond, electric lights pierced the warm, enveloping night. Tommy Atkins at an iron gate, his bandoliers filled with cartridges and the insignia of an Indian regiment beside his collar. Another salute. At the far side of the veranda a doorway shone into the summer evening like a giant yellow firefly of enduring phosphorescence. Against the blue of the sky the leafed branches of an oak tree made fuzzy, indefinite patterns.

The screen door pushed open and a figure in white cast a shadow across the grass. My heart was pumping as if it were manned by the desperate crew of a sinking ship: for months I had waited for this moment, so different from any my imagination had been able to picture.

"Father?" A little hesitation, a bit of uncertainty. "Is that you, dear?"

Clara was tall—tall and slender, with the dark brown hair and gray eyes of her mother. Because I accompanied Major Humbertson, she did not question me. Beyond one startled glance at my white turban, my thick beard and my baggy red trousers, she accepted my presence until such time as her father should explain it. One on either side, Clara and I helped him up the steps.

Half an hour later the wound was washed and freshly bandaged. Major Humbertson addressed himself to me.

"You will find Scotch whisky, a bottle of Schweppes soda water and one glass on a stand in the library. Bring them to me," he said.

I obediently left the room. What passed between him and Clara would have to do exclusively with the uninvited guest of the night. His promise: I would sleep between sheets, for the first time in months on end, and I would not be shackled. That marked the boundary of his hospitality. Outside my door a British private would probably stand guard, with instructions to shoot first and inquire afterward, if I started to prowl through the house—and that in spite of my having warded off the blow which might otherwise have spelled the death of an officer in the army of India.

I acted instinctively in his defense, not because he was Clara's father, but because we both were Anglo-Saxons. My muscles rebelled at his slaughter. Now that I had seen Clara— Yet I was madly in love with the girl. The clasp of her hand on mine as we supported her father brought my blood to a warmth I have never forgotten.

The bottles were on a stand beside a long table piled high with copies of the *Bystander*, *Punch* and the *Illustrated London News*. There were a dozen books of recent publication and a weighty German atlas, all in the rays of a shaded electric reading lamp. In a corner near the fireplace were a couple of tennis rackets in presses and a double-barreled, hammerless shotgun with a walnut stock. Hard to believe that I was still in the land of the Lion and Sun. The

British carry their outward civilization with them, be they living in Singapore, Calcutta—or London.

In a mirror I got a glimpse of my reflection and I stopped, grinning at my clothes in the incongruous surroundings—and my British burden! The cotton tunic I wore was stained and spotted. For seven months my beard had grown; a clean-shaven face in Persia would have aroused many embarrassing questions, unless it belonged to an English soldier. My thick leather boots were turned up at the toes, giving way to bright knitted socks from Kurdistan. The dingy red *zir-jamah* trousers were sufficiently voluminous to provide sails for a sloop. And here I stood, an American prospector, holding the necks of two neatly paired bottles. I erased my smile and moved toward the major's room.

"THAT'S enough, m'dear. Now fill up the glass with soda water." The major looked from Clara to me. "Understand any English?"

"Eengleesh?" My tongue ticked against the roof of my mouth. "No, your Excellency, I do not."

Without blinking an eye, Major Humbertson remarked, "I thought so, Clara." He put down the glass, empty. Fifty-two per cent proof, I had read on the bottle. His cheeks turned pinkish.

Clara wore a thin white dress with a Russian girdle of blue enamel and silver, in links an inch long. I could not take my eyes from her. All the memories of days past, all the emotions dormant in my body, all the bits of association with her, with the people who were also my people by bonds of common language and common feeling, kept tapping for admission, tapping at my brain—when I ought to have been particularly wary.

Suddenly the girl gave a scream of terror. "Behind you—the window!"

I automatically spun around. Two seconds later the glass shivered inward. Almost before the last broken piece ceased its tinkling on the floor, I jerked Major Humbertson's revolver from the holster that lay at my elbow, belt over the back of a chair.

Behind the hole in the window showed the face of a man, glaring and blinking at the lights in the room. My thoughts flashed back to the attack in the prison—to the hatred of the Persians for the conquering British. The hammer of the revolver came down with a click, firing pin striking an empty chamber. Again and again the mechanism snapped.

"That will do, Tatoul. You may go now," said Clara quietly.

And then I knew that they had trapped me.

"A very interesting performance," went on the girl with insulting coolness. "You turned long before the first sound outside. So you *do* understand our language?"

The officer was tremendously revived by the highball in his system. He smiled at me grimly, a little cynically.

"I guessed it at the prison," he said in English, "when that blasted jailer chappie tried to do me in. Gad! If I could speak the idiomatic Persian you can, I'd be dictator of this accursed country in a week. How are things in Russia these days?"

I took off my turban and slung it into a corner. On the veranda I could hear the Armenian servant, Tatoul, adjusting the wire screen he had removed during my brief foray after whisky.

"How are affairs in Russia?" repeated Major Humbertson.

"Russia! How the dickens should I know?"

Clara's eyes were startled, fixed on mine. "Where—where did you learn English—like that?"

"In Persia," I retorted.

"In Persia—not at a mission school?"

"No, from a missionary!"

"From a missionary." Clara was saying the words after me, her gray eyes getting larger and larger. "S-say that—again."

"From my father, Clara."

SHE sprang away, fingers flying to her bosom, face as crimson as the petals of a peony.

"Good God—a missionary!" Major Humbertson spoke as if announcing the discovery of a cockroach which he regarded with a measure of sinister curiosity while he raised the foot he would stamp as soon as his inspection was completed. "A missionary!" The boot fell, precisely. "You blithering ass!"

"Father! Don't! I know him. He's Larry Kittredge—Lieutenant Kittredge, the son of Bishop Kittredge. Don't you remem—"

"I don't care if he's the son of Mars and Aphrodite!" stormed her father. "Ouch! Damn this shoulder! What the devil are you doing, parading through my territory in that idiotic set of clothes? What? As if it isn't senseless enough trying to make Protestants out of perfectly contented Moslems, d'ye have to go round looking like a circus horse? Missionary—bah!"

I stole a glance at Clara. At her deep lips was the phantom of a smile, the duplicate of the expression she wore when I saw her last. That grimace stung me to an irritation I could never have achieved at the taunts of the major.

"Major Humbertson, you've lived in Persia about five years to my twenty-five. Will you reserve your remarks until the time when they may be better informed?"

"Eh?" His lower jaw came out and one hand clenched as tightly as if the muscles were violin strings.

"Since I've denied you the pleasure of seeing me sent to Nishapur, possibly you'll be good enough to let me indulge in a comfortable night's sleep," I went on.

Major Humbertson emitted a dry, throaty sound. He poured himself another Scotch and soda. "For a missionary your kit contained about as few Bibles as a man would find in a Piccadilly American bar."

"Yes," I rejoined sarcastically. "We've learned how to convert with the sword since the last time you saw a missionary!" Nothing mattered to me now. I might just as well stir him up—I rather enjoyed it. From the look of the man it was a considerable period since any one had tried to beard the British Commissioner. His skin was taking on the coloring inherent in a washed beet root, nor was his apoplectic temperature induced by the whisky.

"Father—Larry! Stop it!" Clara put a hand on Major Humbertson's wrist. She leaned over, giving him a kiss on the cheek—a peck of a gesture, revealing to me a moment later the quirky, vanishing, exasperating smile. "You're so stupid, Daddy. Larry isn't a missionary just because his father was. He's exactly what you are—an oil man!"

The major examined me as if he perceived my presence for the first time. His teeth imprisoned his lower lip, the way they did at the jail when he was perplexed. The anger remained compressed, in abeyance.

"How long is it since you've seen an Englishman or an American—er—Kittredge?"

"I was in Teheran last January. Five months."

"There, didn't I tell you, father? He hasn't heard—"

"Haven't you seen one since—since then?" insisted the major, choking over the last two words.

"Not until you honored me by instructing the Dizfoul court to have me packed off to the salt mines," I replied bluntly, mistaking the meaning of his hesitation. Five months may sound like a long time, yet in a country where Westerners are single men in thousands, and where you can almost count the miles of railroad tracks on the fingers of one hand, it is not astonishing.

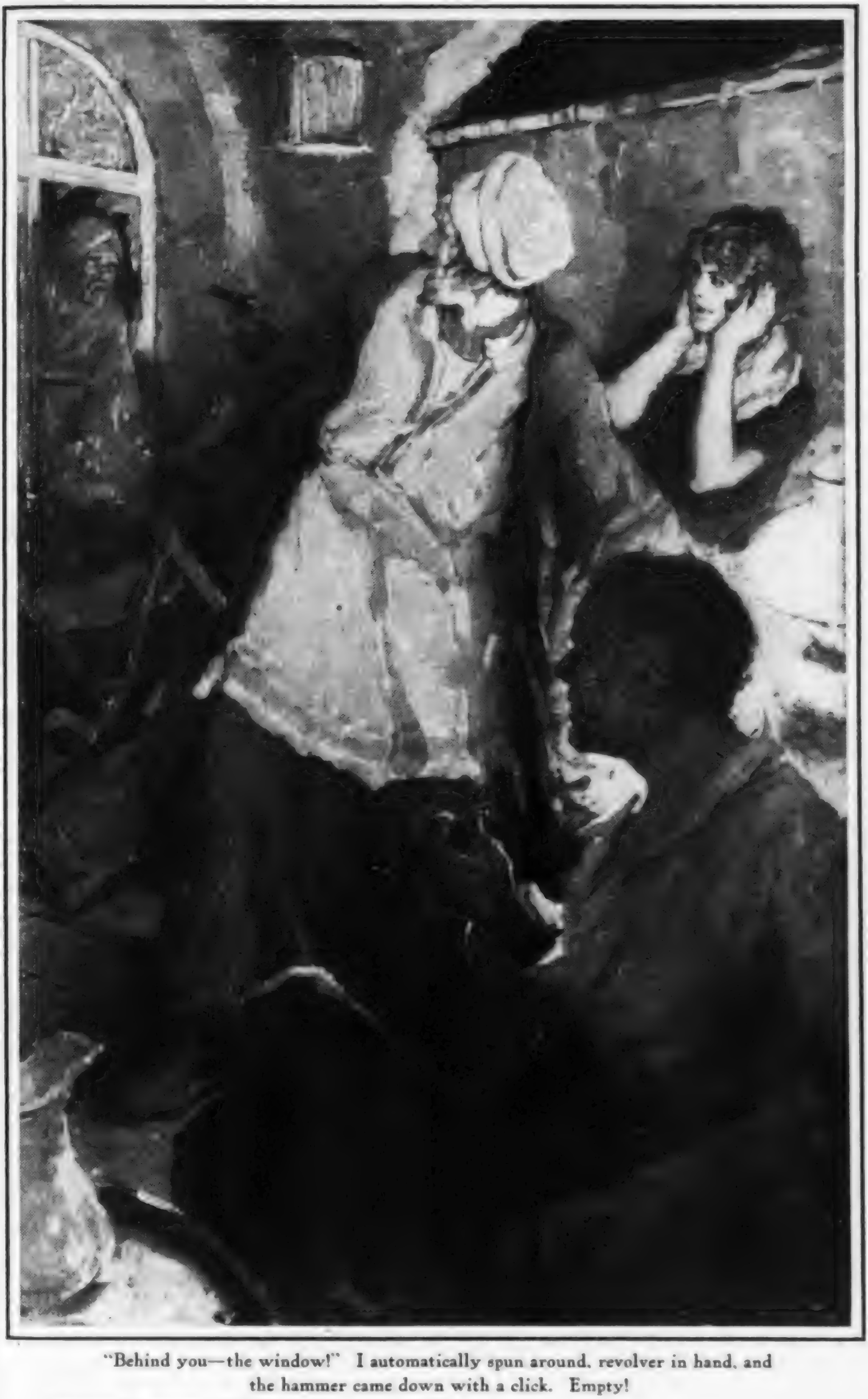
"Last January. By Jove, Clara, you're right!" The major's taut expression relaxed in amusement. His smile impressed me by its warm spontaneity; he pushed the bottle across the table. "Well, in that case, my boy, you've a bit to learn about Persia, in spite of your twenty-five years to my five." He shook his head reprovingly. "That was rather a nasty one, y'know—below the belt and that sort of thing. Go to bed, and when you wake up, you can thank your stars that Bishop Kittredge taught you all he knew about chess-playing!"

IN THAT misty coral dawn that steals out of the Persian night so gently that the dreamer feels the day on his eyelids like delicate fingers, I awoke. It was six-thirty, and the land was moist and still, with tiny diamonds dripping from the leaves of the fig tree beside my window.

I met Clara in the garden, clipping sprays of judas blossoms. Five hundred yards below us Dizfoul was dozing indolently in the sunlight.

"Now you look like your old self, Larry. What a pity you couldn't take your beaver back to London! You'd be game, set, match and tournament, all in one look! But I forget I'm only a colonial. They probably stopped playing beaver months ago." She laid her hand on my arm, cocking her head sidewise at me. "Did you really come to Dizfoul to see me, Larry?"

Her bantering tone hurt, and I did not want to let Clara see it. "What did



"Behind you—the window!" I automatically spun around, revolver in hand, and the hammer came down with a click. Empty!

Major Humbertson mean last night? He had a gloating expression when I went out of the room."

"So discourteous of him to gloat, wasn't it?" murmured Clara. "About those five months, Larry. Is it true—since you talked to an American?"

"Certainly. What of it?"

"Oh, nothing you'd be interested in, perhaps."

I swung her about, trying to look into her eyes. They avoided me. "What is it? What's happened since last January?"

"I can't believe you don't know."

"Don't know *what*?"

"Lots of things. That the dear old British Colonial Oil Company is dissolved, for instance. Good heavens! You didn't know it! Well, neither do the Dizfoul natives, so that isn't so remarkable."

"Dissolved?" I echoed, falling back a step. "The British Colonial Oil Company dissolved? Then what are you doing here, Clara?"

"Waiting for the joint control. They ought to arrive in a couple of weeks. You see, we weren't so dense as you thought we were. We could see the way things were going—the Persians getting frantic over not making any money out of their own oil fields and everything. So a new agreement was drawn up. The company has its capital divided into three equal parts: British, Persian—and American! The Russians were furious. Now do you see why father thought you were one of their spies?"

Figuratively speaking, I collapsed on the garden walk. I removed myself therefrom with extreme difficulty, dusted myself off and straightened Major Humbertson's brown necktie in the collar of Major Humbertson's khaki shirt. Then—also figuratively (which was fortunate)—I kicked myself seven times around the clay tennis court. The things I said to myself would be absolutely impossible to transcribe in any language.

Clara giggled. "You're such a jolly old thing, Larry—and so mixed up and confused. Nobody but you would come poking into Dizfoul the way you did; but then, nobody but you would have gone messing around the country all by yourself for months at a time. You must be a walking encyclopedia on Persia. Weren't you just a little bit lonesome sometimes?"

"If you enjoy rubbing it in, Clara, you must be having a successful morning."

"I am," she informed me confidently. "You see, when you went away, I knew you'd come back. You were so sure I was going to refuse you that day in Bagdad, that you didn't wait to hear what I *might* have told you. What is it they say in Persian when the next move ends the chess game?"

"What on earth has that to do with it?" I was still so shaken by what she told me that I hardly heard the last few sentences.

"You know; you would have said it to father last night in a few more plays. He told me so."

"*Shah mat?*"

"That's it. *Shah mat,*" she repeated dreamily. "The Shah is dead. That means the game's over, doesn't it?"

A high, mossy wall blocked our path, shutting in the trees and shrubbery that had once formed the grounds of a rich Persian prince, before the days of the invading Europeans. The wall was covered with green vines and among the roots grew white jasmine flowers, fragrant with the morning dew upon them. Around us were the judas trees, petaled with myriad blobs of pink, like waxy shavings from numberless birthday candles. We did not hear the crunchy sound made by feet on the pebbles.

I took Clara's wrists, drawing her hands from her face.

"Clara—don't!" I caught sight of her eyes, wide and more than a little misty.

"I knew you'd come back—because I wanted you so. That was the reason—Oh, Larry!" Her hands crept up to my shoulders, tightening behind my head. It bent forward now, of its own accord. Our lips touched, lightly—then so hard all the breath seemed to catch in my lungs.

IN THIS wise did the burly gardener, Tatoul Hagopian, receive a shock even more potent than the one he survived the night before when I pointed the officer's revolver at him. It was Tatoul's business to inform us that Major Humbertson was ready for breakfast.

Clara stirred in my arms. "Oh, dear! I haven't cut a single flower for the table."

The Armenian withdrew, coughing apologetically.

Clara smiled, her lashes scraping my neck. "Checkmate!" she whispered.

TRADE

A Piece of Yellowish Rock Carelessly Tossed Away by an Indian Trapper Starts Ripples in Life That Return to the Wilderness to Confound Him

By Alan Sullivan

AJIDAMO, the Squirrel, pushed his way through the undergrowth. He had been walking thus, silently and observantly, for hours, while he made the round of his traps. Like a brown ghost he came, guided by a broken twig here, an overturned leaf there and other signs so faint as to be imperceptible save to the eye of an aborigine. It was mid-afternoon when he reached a ridge where most of the rock was bare, and the forest pushed up close on either side. Hard by the ridge in a clump of ground hemlock was a stream on whose banks the snow still lay a few inches deep. Beside the stream glinted a small steel trap. In the trap was a mink with russet-brown fur.

Ajidamo grunted complacently, opened the spring, dropped his quarry into a sack where it nestled softly against an otter and a stone marten, then took his way silently along the ridge. He did not hurry. The day was fine, and he was at home wherever sunset might overtake him.

Three hundred yards farther on lay a young Norway pine overthrown by winter winds. Its black roots were lifted grotesquely into the air and they carried patches of earth and moss. In one of these tangles Ajidamo noticed a piece of rock different from any he had ever seen. It was strongly gripped, as though in a man's hand, and the level rays of the sun seemed to pass through it. He looked at it curiously. To the ordinary observer it would have resembled a bit of semi-transparent alabaster inclosing a twist of gilded lace. To a mining man it would have been a sample of high-grade, free-milling gold ore. But to Ajidamo it was only something different. Just for that reason he knocked it free, examined it closely with unwinking black eyes and dropped it in beside the stone marten.

He tramped on, slept that night five miles away, continued his silent pilgrimage another twenty miles, and reached his winter camp at sundown. Here he thawed out his take, pulled the precious skins inside out over the slim red bodies, threw the bodies into the pot and stretched the fur over thin, wedge-shaped pieces of wood. He thought no more about the piece of rock till, presently, his oldest grandchild, rummaging in the sack with reddened fingers, pulled the thing out. Ajidamo took it, held it questioningly toward his daughter, and when she shook her head tossed the fragment carelessly back.

Storms raged and ceased, snow fell and melted, the sun grew stronger, water began to run over the rocks, the wilderness seemed to yawn luxuriously in the growing warmth after months of rigid slumber, and presently spring came to the northern wilderness. There was a slackening of the bones of earth, the whiteness of rabbit fur became patched with dirty brown, from the skies drifted the calling of geese and swans on the long trek to the Arctic, and a thousand streams burst their manacles and went singing through the woods. It was at this time that Ajidamo gathered together his winter's catch. Then he lifted his canoe from the place where it had lain covered with spruce boughs since last November, sewed up its gaping seams with fine strips of tamarack root, sealed them with cloth dipped in hot resin and went off to the nearest Hudson's Bay post, which was a hundred miles away, as quietly as a dry leaf moves in front of a puff of wind.

THE Hudson's Bay factor is a taciturn man, clothed generally in nondescript garments and always with a great authority. His word goes forth as the law of the northern wilderness, because it has never been broken. To Ojibway and Iroquois, to Yellow-knife and Cree, to Piegan and Blackfoot that word is the same. When it comes to a matter of trade, the bargain is hard and the terms are stiff, but the faith is absolute. Thus it happens that in a season of the year the hunters turn from the smoke of a thousand camp-fires and push their canoes over leagues of water, black and brown, by lake and rapid and cataract, to do business as their fathers did it, with the offspring of those who traded with their fathers.

Thus came Ajidamo to the post on Crooked Lake. He came at his own pace, a leisurely twenty miles a day, observing much on the journey, for when one lives by eye and ear and the strength of one's sinews there is much to be learned be one ever so old, and Ajidamo was only seventy. He caught a few fish, mostly in the rapids where pickerel were to be had for the taking, snared a few rabbits, drank a good deal of tea and smoked incessantly. In the bottom of the canoe, tied neatly in the sack, were mink, otter, marten, a few fisher skins and one cross fox. He hoped for a good deal from the latter.

Nearing the post, he fell in with others on the same errand. Some he knew personally, such as Wa-wa, the Wild Goose, and Ah-tick, the Caribou, but they did not talk much, making camp the last night a little way apart on the river's bank, so that their fires blinked like a succession of the red eyes of animals that came down in the dark to drink when drinking could be done safely. Nor was there any hustling for bargains when the post was reached, it being common knowledge that prices did not vary. Each of them came up in turn, emptied his catch on the roughhewn counter, and waited voicelessly till the factor had checked the number of skins and formed his own opinion of their condition and value. While he waited there was a swift, narrow-eyed scrutiny of the loaded shelves, bulging with all that the heart of man, woman or child could desire. Not the least thing to the credit of Ajidamo and his friends was the fact that no Hudson's Bay post reported losses by theft.

When it came Ajidamo's turn, he upended his sack, and with the fur there tumbled out that forgotten fragment of rock. It fell to the floor, lying unnoticed till the bargaining was done. Ajidamo owed fifty dollars from last year, and when this had been liquidated he still found himself able to get most of the things he wanted. Cloth, a red shawl for his daughter, powder for recharging rifle cartridges, lead, three new traps, a four-pound ax head, a net with four-inch mesh for whitefish, a slab of salt pork, tea, sugar, baking powder. These he collected, making a neat pile that rose beside him. The factor put in a pound of tobacco as a present, then leaned forward.

"What's yon bit of rock?"

Ajidamo gave it to him, and shook his head. "I don't know. Maybe no good."

The factor twisted it between his hard fingers. "Where did it come from?"

Ajidamo made a gesture that took in the entire country lying north of Crooked Lake. "Up there, long way—me find him two months gone. I guess no good."

Followed a little silence. There were rumors of gold in the district, talks of gold around a good many camp-fires, and a trickle of prospectors from the area farther south. The factor had a month-old paper that had come in by dog team the week before, and there was an article in that. He didn't take it very seriously. This was a good fur country, and that ought to be enough for him. He didn't know anything about minerals. But one could never tell. He turned the thing round so that the light fell into it, and thought it very pretty.

"Want it?" he asked Ajidamo.

The old hunter shook his head.

"Me think no good," he said, and gathered up his purchases.

KELLY was playing out of luck. He lay on his back in his tent, slapped at mosquitoes, and cursed creation in general. For a year now he had been scratching rock to no purpose. Other men had made good strikes, cleaned up a pile and had either got out of the blasted country or else done the same thing over again. But on the Abitibi the Irish seemed to have lost their luck.

Added to this was the sobering fact that he was nearly broke. The small sum of forty dollars separated him from that bankruptcy which meant that he would have to work for some one else, a fate that all real prospectors dread. To get up in the morning and feel that you couldn't go where you wanted to go was something worse than death. It stared Kelly in the face now. If one adds to this the further truth that he was nearly out of grub, the venom of his language will be the more understandable.

He lighted a pitch-pine knot, took a torn map from his packsack, and studied it intently. It was thumbed and mutilated beyond repair, but still decipherable. In the flicker, and between slaps at the mosquitoes, which were now worse than before, he saw that the post of Crooked Lake lay about two days' journey off. H B P, the map said, from which Kelly knew that there was to be obtained all that made life feasible in the wilderness. He reckoned that the damned district was no good, never had been and never would be any good, but, because he was in the middle of it, decided to give it just one more chance. So at daybreak he started off, making a bee line for Crooked Lake, and wondering what the Scotchman who was bound to be in charge would have the nerve to ask for a fifty-pound sack of self-rising flour. He arrived on the eve of the second day in a worse temper than ever. Mackintosh looked in his angry eye, and waited placidly. He was a man of experience.

" 'Twill be ten cents a pound, cash," he said easily.

Kelly gulped. "It's a hold-up—three cents a pound in Toronto."

"Ye're no forced to buy it if ye dinna want it," said Mackintosh.

"You know damn well I've got to buy it, but it's a hell of a price."

"Maybe. I'm not disputin' that, but it didn't exactly fly here, ye ken."

"Can I have twenty dollars' credit?"

Mackintosh shook his head. "If ye were an Indian; but I'll no trust a white man in this country." He paused a moment. "Happen ye're not a squaw man? That might help."

This left Kelly breathless, and he rocked with anger.

"Think I'd marry an Indian?" he asked.

"Ye might do a sight waur," said Mackintosh calmly. "I've married ane mysel'. D'ye want that flour?"

Kelly swallowed his wrath, and bought. With the flour were other things, and while the factor sorted them out his visitor's eye fell on a fragment of rock that glinted whitely on a corner shelf.

"What's that?" he said, pointing.

"Naethin' but a bit that ane of ma customers left here last winter. D'ye ken what it is?"

Kelly fingered the thing, and his pulse began to pound. Never in his dreams had he seen a specimen like this. A thousand dollars to the ton if it was worth a cent!

"Careful," he whispered to himself, "careful now!" He laid it casually back on the counter.

"It might be worth following up. Where does the Indian live? I'll drop in if I'm in that direction."

"I'm no sure where he is the noo, but he wintered on Loon Lake. That's a hundred mile from here."

"What's he call himself?" Kelly's voice creaked a little.

AJIDAMO sat in the sun, making a new cedar paddle which would be as light as a feather. One end of it was against his stomach, and he drew the knife toward him with long, smooth strokes while the shavings fell away in neat, regular curls. Presently he saw a distant flicker on the glassy water. There was a white man coming.

Kelly floated up half an hour later, laid his own paddle across the thwarts, leaned forward and lit his pipe.

"*Boozhoo*," he said.

"*Boozhoo*," replied Ajidamo. "*Meno keejegud*."

Kelly admitted that it was a fine day, took another look at the camp and came ashore. He had given a good deal of thought to this interview. When one dealt with an Indian, the thing was not to be too earnest or impetuous. It made the other fellow suspicious. One led up to what one wanted, then touched on it casually in passing. So he, too, lay in the sun and talked generalities of the wilderness while the paddle took shape under Ajidamo's firm, brown fingers. It was not till evening that he got round to the subject.

"Much fur last winter?"

"Some," said Ajidamo, and put a kettle on the fire.

"Smoke?" Kelly tossed over a plug of tobacco.

The ancient aristocrat nodded, filled his pipe, and relapsed into silence. He wasn't interested, or even amused. He ripped up the belly of a five-pound pickerel, carved out its backbone with two swift strokes and laid it in the pan. Kelly contributed a lump of salt pork. The meal was shared without speech. Kelly glanced at the grave, aquiline face and felt like choking, but it was no use trying to hustle a man for whom time and space and riches and the world in general did not exist. Still there remained the outrageous fact that this relic of a vanishing race possessed knowledge that was worth a barrel of money. He decided to wait a little longer.

An hour before sunset, he unrolled his blankets, and there fell out a piece of white quartz. He pitched it across to Ajidamo.

"Ever see any rock like that?"

Ajidamo fingered it, and knew at once all about it. The upturned Norway pine, earth and moss in its roots, and this glistening in the sun. So that was what had brought the stranger! He rather liked Kelly because the latter hadn't jumped down his throat, bombarding him with questions. There was a way of doing everything—even talking about rocks.

"Over there," he said, pointing west.

"Far?"

"Two days."

Kelly laid a hot coal in the bowl of his pipe just to make sure of his nerves. They were quite steady.

"How much—go there?"

Ajidamo considered this patiently. He usually asked two dollars and a half a day for what little work he had ever done, and he never got anything for the return trip because one place was the same as another as far as he was concerned. But this time, and since something assured him that Kelly was very much in earnest, he decided to take a chance and double the charge.

"Ten dollars," he said.

Kelly shook his head. "Too much. Give you five."

PATERSON had a combined office and residence on the outskirts of the town of Porcupine, a wooden structure, twelve by twenty-four. Over the door was a large sign: "Mines and Mining Shares Bought and Sold." He lived in the other end—twelve by twelve. In the office were shelves carrying samples of ore from various properties. The sight of them was apt to impress a client, and helped to keep up his enthusiasm, for he had never bought a share or sold a mine. His capital was five thousand dollars.

He was lounging about in front when Kelly came up the road, staggering under a packsack, which, though it was only half filled, seemed extremely heavy. He dropped it opposite the office for a rest, and Paterson caught the grinding creak of broken rock. He strolled over, and offered the stranger a cigarette.

"Got anything?"

Kelly glanced at the broad, red, good-natured face, and rather liked it.

"I've got the original horned mint," he said. "What have you got?"

"A bottle, and a few thousand dollars. What's your hurry?"

Kelly brightened, then hesitated. "What do you call a few?"

"Enough to buy the real thing when I see it. And the other stuff isn't wood alcohol."

Kelly went in. Paterson was right about the bottle, and it was some time before they got round to the packsack. Neither wanted to seem in a hurry, and Paterson played the rôle of Kelly when the latter did diplomatic work in the camp of Ajidamo. The scale of intelligence ascended.

The upended packsack disgorged its burden. Gold—lots of it: gold in little filaments and plates and grains, frozen, seemingly, in the milky quartz. Paterson had seen nothing like this before.

"Not so bad," he said evenly. "Where is it?"

Kelly laughed at him. The latter had had a good many drinks, but his mind was fairly clear.

"Nothin' doing, pilgrim. I'm no free information bureau."

Paterson passed on undisturbed. He

didn't expect to be told yet, but it was worth trying.

"Much of it?"

"She's about eight hundred feet long, and seven wide. I stripped her in seven places—all about the same. Some of it's richer than this, and some not so good. Can you beat it?"

Paterson had a lump in his throat. "Far from the water?"

"About a quarter-mile."

"Hard to get at?"

"Easy as drink."

"There's another bottle," said Paterson.

He went into the back room, and prized up a plank in the floor. Precious stuff, this, saved over for just such an occasion. His heart was jumping about, so he poured himself a drink very slowly to try his nerve. Nothing spilled. He returned, comforted and resolute, and put the bottle on the table.

"Cut loose, stranger. What's your name and your price?"

Kelly leaned back luxuriously. He had been thinking about the price ever since Ajidamo led him up to the overturned Norway pine, and he actually saw the thing he had dreamed of for years. The figure had varied a good deal on the way out, but never got any smaller. In the glow of the present moment he decided to take a chance and double it.

"I want ten thousand down, twenty in three months and another twenty in six."

"Give you half that, and it's a deal," said Paterson.

JAMES RANDOLPH, of New York, sat at a corner table in the dining-room of the Porcupine Hotel. He was a quiet man, very silent, and had a keen gray eye. Nothing conspicuous about Randolph: nothing to betray the fact that he was a noted geologist; nothing to suggest that he represented enough money to buy the entire township and all in it twice over. He ate slowly, and without interest, glancing occasionally at the very mixed assemblage.

Two strangers came in and annexed the adjoining table, one large, red-faced and of the type recognizable as "mining broker," the other evidently just out of the woods. They were not drunk, but very cheerful, and Randolph wondered where they got it. One ate peas with his knife, very neatly and without spilling any, while the other, apparently not hungry, ranged a row of quartz specimens in front of his plate. Randolph noted these, and forgot about their owner. Ten minutes later he strolled out, took a chair on the veranda near the dining-room door, and began to smoke.

"Eight hundred long, seven wide, and pans heavy all the way. She's the original nickel-plated mint, pilgrim, and you ought to be tick'ed down the back." The words came quite clearly.

Presently the large man appeared, and struck off down the road. Randolph pitched away his cigarette, and paced slowly in that direction.

At two o'clock Paterson had the thing pretty well thought out. He proposed to make his pile out of this one deal, as it was not likely anything of the same sort would come his way again. He had to find another twenty thousand in six months, so a fair price would be a hundred thousand in five. He was gloating over the samples, when a stranger chanced in and asked the way to the Lockmaster Mine.

The latter got the information and was about to walk on, when he glanced casually at the specimens on Paterson's table.

"That looks to be pretty good stuff."

Paterson surmised that it was, the best stuff that ever came out of the darned district, and, what's more, he owned it.

"Whereabouts?" asked the stranger.

Paterson grinned. "That exact information comes after a deal and not before it."

"Far from here?"

"No—easy as drink. Have one?"

"Guaranteed?"

"Have it, and see for yourself. You in the mining business?"

"In a sort of way. Friends of mine might put some money in. But I'm told there's been a lot lost up here."

Paterson chuckled. " 'Tain't lost if you know where it is."

Randolph didn't answer. He was wondering how much the other man knew about mines and mining.

"Is this much of a vein you've got?"

The figures came out, and he looked up rather wistfully.

"It's this way with me. I'm free to buy something for my friends to develop. That stuff seems to have gold in it, and in a general way I'm ready for a gamble. What's your price?"

Paterson told him, but he shook his head.

"Figures too big for me. Doesn't matter. I'm going on to the silver country tomorrow, and just came over here for a look. I've real money to spend, but not as much as that. Must keep something for development." He got up, smiling. "Thanks for a real drink."

Paterson reflected. He'd rather like to say he'd bought a lode and sold it in four hours. And perhaps the late vendor was a bit of a liar. "Suppose you made an offer?"

"My limit is just half your price. And you'd have to show me the lode before you got the check."

"Just as the other fellow has to show me before he gets his, eh?"

"Exactly."

"Shake on it," said Paterson.

AJIDAMO had heard it all afternoon, a low, constant rumble that sounded like distant thunder, but was always in the same place. It grew louder as he paddled, till, rounding a point, he saw, ahead, a great gash in the wooded slope of the land. It was now more than a year since he had been here last, and then he had come to show a stranger the spot where a young Norway pine lay with its roots in the air.

He stopped paddling a quarter-mile from shore, and drifted motionless while comprehension slowly deepened in his dark eyes. Up the hill, and just at the spot he remembered, was a tall timber thing on top of which was a wheel that went round very fast. Below this descended a nest of great buildings. On one side houses, the only kind of house he had ever seen, with a white road running between them. There was a dock, two or three launches, scows, men sprinkled everywhere, long piles of wood, and always that queer rumble. Close to the water he saw a log shanty he took to be the store. At that he dipped his paddle, and the canoe moved as does a thought in the mind of a lazy man.

He got out on a strip of sand that wasn't there before. Sharp and very white, it was being carried down by a trough from the lowest and biggest building of all. He had never seen sand like that before. Ajidamo could not know that the ore from which it was crushed had lain two hundred feet below the roots of the Norway pine. He could not know that the Broadvenue Mine—thus christened because its owners did business in a marble-lined aerie near the corner of the two most famous streets of a very famous city—had repaid its purchase price in the first month's run. He could not know what happened to Kelly or Paterson or any of them; nor would he have cared. What he did know was that his share of all this was five dollars. And at that he grunted softly.

The storekeeper at the Broadvenue was not versed in the ways of the country. Also he knew nothing and cared nothing about Indians. So when Ajidamo came in on moccasined feet and, unwrapping four silver dollars from a bit of caribou skin, asked for flour, he got much less than he should have had. This time the price was doubled, not halved. Nor was he given a plug of tobacco, which was gross discourtesy as well as a tactical error; and in general he received such treatment as no Hudson's Bay factor would have dreamed of extending to a member of the most ancient family of the land.

"Is that all you want?"

"Yes," said Ajidamo.

"Then clear out, and take this. Don't eat it—it's to wash with. You need it."

Ajidamo looked at him, but did not touch the soap. The young man, knowing Third Avenue, thought he knew everything; but he did not understand that look. There was dignity in it, and a silent pride born of thousands of years of freedom, and a sort of vague wonder. The aged hunter had become used to something different, and a certain mutual civility, and prices that, if hard, were at least stable. So he felt that this change, and these bad manners, and the rumble that shook the earth, and this short measure were in a way all his own fault. Furthermore every one seemed to be doing well in this matter except himself. He picked up the flour, and went slowly out.

Halting on the white sand, he took a piece of quartz from his pocket. It was about the same size as the first one, but infinitely richer, and nearly half gold. He had found it three months previously in a spot only a day's journey distant, but in such a corner that it was very unlikely to be found again. The last piece had earned five dollars and he had hoped that this one would bring him as much. Perhaps it was worth ten.

He turned it over in his smooth, callous palm for a moment, then pitched it into the lake.

The Man Who Wouldn't Hurt Any One's Feelings

MARCH WINDS

Reënter Maizie—and Tommy Finds One More Complication in Working Out His Single Guiding Principle

By Francis R. Bellamy

Author of "A Flash of Gold"

Illustrations by John R. Neill

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story up to this point is here.

DIANE took Tommy into the front drawing-room.

"Wait a minute," she said. "I want to see old Mercer. I'll be right back."

"All right!" he said.

He had a curiously stifled feeling. Upon him there was the oppression that comes before a storm; he had the feeling of impending events, stirring, ominous, yet eagerly to be met.

Diane was lovely. There was glamour about her, that rarest of all qualities. Wanton she was, in her childish way; for all her passionate intensity he was profoundly sure that she was still a child; that her provocativeness, the intimacy that she allowed—no, demanded!—really meant nothing.

He was glad to be friends with her again. It meant something, this commission her father, Patterson Shirley, had given him. It meant the restoration of his career, abandoned when he had gone, very early in the game, to the war—to give up four years of his life to that vast madness. It wasn't easy for a sculptor, once forgotten, to establish himself again. Yet he was in the way to do it.

And he liked Diane; liked to make light love to her, knowing all the time how little it meant.

Still—once before he had done that, in the idyl of Cannes! Maizie! The memory of her tore at him. That last moment—when, after her surrender, she had penetrated his true feeling—his lack of love, as she knew love, for her! And she had disappeared so utterly—leaving him as he was now, as he had been ever since, baffled, frustrated. Oh, his father was right, he supposed—always had been right. He had given too little thought to living, to the creation of himself—and too much thought to his work!

Diane came back.

"I sent him to bed!" she said. She drew the curtains, noisily.

"You'll startle Auntie Lyn out of her beauty sleep!" he said.

"Oh, she isn't here!" said Diane carelessly.

"Not here!" exclaimed Tommy.

"We're alone. Isn't it a relief, once in a while?"

"I suppose it is," he agreed.

"Auntie Lyn went up to Stockbridge this afternoon," she explained.

"Oh, I didn't understand that," said Tommy.

"I don't wonder!"

"I can smoke then?"

"Certainly!"

"Thanks."

He lit his cigarette, with a sudden half-memory—or was he mistaken—that Diane had said she couldn't go to a roof garden because she must get back to Auntie Lyn's; and yet—

"It's the first time," Diane's voice broke in on him, "that she's been out of town in Heaven knows when. I thought we could have a nice evening, anyway—even if you were horrid."

"But I wasn't horrid," he said, uncomfortably.

She looked down at her hands. "I thought you were," she said.

"Because I didn't—"

"Because of the interpretation you put on my actions!" she cried with a rush.

"I didn't—"

"That's why I wanted to see 'June Love'—and that girl. I can't help the way I'm made!" There was an odd tone of self-justification. "Why shouldn't I—"

"Because you aren't in love—"

"Don't you think so?"

"Why—"

"Then what is it?"

"Why—"

"I'll show you," she said; and she kissed him.

"That's the way I feel about you," she said in a whisper—and she buried her face on his shoulder. "Isn't that love?"

"But I'm not in love with you, Di!" he said unsteadily. As if he stabbed himself, were those words! "I can't deceive you about that."

"You might learn to be!" she answered.

She showed no signs of fainting—she had not even cried out at the blow.

"But that wouldn't be fair to you," he said.

"Supposing I don't mind?"

She put her arms round his neck again.

"But Diane!" he said desperately. "You can't do this!"

"Oh, yes, I can!" she said. She gave a tiny, fleeting smile. "Don't you like me?" she asked.

"Why, of course—"

"Then I don't see the harm," she said indignantly. "You have the weirdest ideas!"

IT WAS just a month later that the clan awoke.

"Tommy's got a girl!"

That was the word that went the rounds at Mori's and Bertolini's, at Ugobono's and Romany Marie's, at Christine's and the Village Kitchen. Tommy, who had always been off women ever since any one could remember!

Tommy had a girl!

Jimmy had seen her over at the Kitchen! Rudy Sylvester had encountered her twice, walking down Fifth Avenue with Tommy; Madame Bertollini had noticed her at dinner four nights running; the entire clan had seen her come in downstairs at the Brevoort, always with Tommy! And he had not introduced her to a soul.

"He's afraid to!" Jimmy Watts proclaimed in Christine's, at the long table by the wall. "She's a cutie-cutie! The society kind, that likes hardwood floors and tea at five o'clock, and cretonne in the bedroom, just as page seven shows in this beautiful interior!"

"There's nothing repellent about that ivory-white throat, though," remarked Rudy.

"Her eyes," said George Mallock meditatively, "gazing at rain-swept New England coasts! That blue-black hair against the white panels of a New England dining-room!"

"Oh, yes, some kid!" admitted Jimmy. "Tommy has taste. But I'll bet you we don't see much of her!"

"Or Tommy," added Stork ironically.

And the meeting adjourned to Sylvester's studio.

THAT was the verdict of Tommy's immediate circle, indeed: he had taste but Diane wouldn't fit in. She might smoke cigarettes and take a drink (Stork had confirmed this), but she wouldn't enjoy the parties at Rudy's. She looked more like a regulation society girl, the kind that would be at home in furs, in a limousine.

She had a free-and-easy air, of course; but that didn't mean much in this new set of débutantes. Slushy, innocuous stories, and pictures of the latest fashions! She would want Tommy to be washing his hands and getting his hair cut, and buying new suits, instead of tipping the bottle at Max's!

There were many views on sex, indeed. among that little clan of the Beaux Arts—varying from Jimmy Watts, with his roving propensities, to George Mallock, with his wife and four children up under the eaves of 70 Washington Square, and all the inextricable tangle of tragedy in the ruins of his marriage. But there was substantial agreement on one thing: no artist should marry a regulation, conventional-minded wife.

In a sense, it was the clan's expression of disapproval of the world it both courted and turned its back upon—a world, in its view, devoted solely to selfishness and the dollar. But, lying deeper and more real, it was the admission that nothing should hamper the artist in search of truth; that art was an adventure in which marriage and children and safety were only a drawback. One of the few real adventures left! That was art!

"But there isn't the slightest idea of marriage, I tell you," Tommy pointed out to Stork, touchily, at the end of July. "Girls are different nowadays."

"Their families aren't so different, are they?" inquired the Stork.

"They've given up trying to sit on Di," said Tommy.

"Just what do you call it, then?" inquired the painter.

"Does it have to be named?" retorted Tommy.

"It looks to me like an engagement."

"Well, it isn't," said Tommy pointedly. "And anyway, she's gone abroad for the summer!"

He turned on his heel and went clattering down the painter's stairs, quite full of the conviction.

•

TOMMY had had just four weeks of intimacy with Diane and nothing was clearer than the fact that there could be no question of marriage between them. He had found her as enchanting and varied as an April sky. Her embrace was like some magic draught, resulting in emotional intoxication. But marriage was not in her philosophy. She preferred freedom to do as she pleased. The intricate questions of morals and relationships which had flung themselves at him, had vanished. In their place had come the give-and-take of an emotional duel which had fascinated him, and banished all else.

Yet in the noon heat of his own studio one day, he put down abruptly the model on which he was working, struck for the first time by the variance between his actions and what he had hitherto considered his ideals.

This very model upon which he worked had sprung from a memory of a day in San Rafael, when Maizie had held out a saucer of seeds to two tiny bluebirds that fluttered in the garden. Her face had lighted up with tenderness as one of them had settled on the rim of the saucer; and he had never forgotten her attitude—sitting on the grass, leaning on one elbow toward the birds, tenderness in every line. From the remembrance he had designed this model: a slim girl lying on a slab of rock, her slender arms holding out a bowl toward the birds—a bowl from which water dripped; on her face an intent, tender, idyllic expression; in her nude figure unconscious grace and innocence.

Such a figure, he had divined, would melt into Mr. Shirley's garden perfectly—glimpsed between the cypresses, beyond the stone steps, at the far side of the pool. The mystery of happiness come upon, suddenly, in the woods!

In fact, the dim ideal it represented had touched him; it was the kind of thing he admired—a sort of symbol of unselfish kindness, standing forever in Patterson Shirley's garden. Even now it expressed his ideas as clearly as he himself could express them.

But what were his actions meanwhile? Dalliance with a girl with whom he was merely infatuated! Petty larceny of her young passions! That was all the thing was, despite all Diane might say.

A man and a sculptor, Tommy, aged thirty-two and in his sound and right mind; but getting for the first time a real glimpse of himself. Hitherto, he perceived—a trifle unwillingly—he had considered himself rather fine—somewhat superior to Jimmy Watts; infinitely superior to Stork. But the truth apparently was that until now he had not been introduced to life. It had remained for Diane, of this new generation, to give him his introduction.

That one dim compass, indeed, by which he had hitherto steered the ship of his existence, that desire of his to hurt no one, which had been his practical guide in almost every affair of life until now, seemed somehow to have proved suddenly uncertain, inadequate to steer by any longer.

He knew, of course, what Stork would say to his present situation. Stork would say he was fighting a phantom, a cloudy relic of Puritanism. The conception of sex as the great driving power, the great energizer of mankind, was one of the painter's favorite tenets. Passion in painting, in music, in engineering, in architecture, in literature! It was the primal instinct, the one great fact of life. Everything could be traced to it; everything lay tinged by its glow—the schoolgirl, dreaming at night; the preacher, thundering in his pulpit; the child, stroking the kitten; the vast audience spellbound at the opera!

At the base of all achievement lay sex. There was no life without it. There was no appreciation of life without it. There was no personality without it. There was no laughter, appetite, pain, without it. There was no work done, without its flame. It lay in the dancer and the dance; in the book and its reader; in the man and the woman!

"It's what the artist needs," Stork would say. "It refreshes the creative mind like a drink!"

Stork believed that.

But Tommy did not believe it. He did not know what he believed. He had no definite creed. He did not visualize a definite personal God who said to him, Tommy Dumbarton: "This is a sin!" No. Fear of personal consequences did not weigh with him when he shrank from an act. Only that dim desire not to hurt his fellow man! That was all that appeared to him.

And in this particular case, that did not seem to apply!

In this case it merely seemed to emphasize that lack of definite belief or compass of which he was already conscious.

THE first time Tommy had been definitely aware of that lack of compass was that night—good Lord, it was seven years ago, now!—when he had met Johnny Firth again, for the first time since they had parted by Robinson Hall in Cambridge. They had stood on the corner of Twelfth Street, after the meeting of the Listeners' Club, to which Johnny had taken him. He could see the old Elephant's big features and shining eyes yet, as he gave his reasons for going to Wyoming and starting life as a missionary in a box-car church.

God had been as clear and real a personality to Johnny as the policeman who had watched them doubtfully from the far corner, by the cigar store. That was all life was, the old Elephant had said finally—a pathway to God and happiness.

He had turned on his heel, at last, and caught a surface car to the Pennsylvania Station and Wyoming, while Tommy had remained on the corner a good half-hour before he had finally gone on down to Fourth Street and routed out Stork for a bottle or two over at Max's.

"Johnny's got hold of something real," he had tried to tell Stork.

But that gloomy gentleman had refused to be stirred.

"Oh, don't talk to me about parsons," he had said, after the first bottle. "They're too earnest! What the hell does it matter where life is going? Nobody knows anything about it, anyway!"

And Tommy had agreed, after several futile attempts to dissent.

That was the last time, as a matter of fact, that he had even thought about religion—even considered the foundations on which he was building his life. It had happened so, principally—he admitted—because he had not been forced to do so, because nothing had occurred to make it necessary, because he had not been able to see that it made any difference. He had rather shied away from highly moral people, for one thing, because he had considered them unnecessarily righteous. He had esteemed humor and tolerance as of more value in life.

And yet, it seemed, after a while moral principles did make a difference.

A man could not drift pleasantly forever, apparently, because he drifted into doubtful situations—because life brought him to too plainly marked crossroads in time—crossroads such as this affair with Diane began to offer.

"The way Stork and Jimmy began, I suppose," he said aloud.

He swung on to a Fifth Avenue bus and climbed up on top as it rumbled past the gray arch in Washington Square and started uptown past the crowds of the noon hour—patches of masculine drab, of feminine color, of wind-blown youthful figures, outlined on the crowded July pavement; drenched—rather surprisingly—with all the voluptuousness of the East as Fourteenth Street passed and the sensuous figures of young Jewish girls crowded the walks, and the masses of the clothing district poured out of the side cañons! Touched with fantasy by Twenty-third Street where the broad avenue disappeared completely beneath the solid mass of motors, trucks, busses, straw hats and hurrying, pushing people—and the street resembled more a moving, coagulating stream than an avenue of stone and asphalt, immovable under the blue July sky.

A challenge, certainly, to the dogma of the survival of personality, in this view at noon up the avenue of avenues! Irresistible, the comparison with the leaves of the trees, the insects of the fields, the fishes of the sea—so many, many! A task, a soul, a separate future, a distinct, everlasting personality for each?

"I wonder," muttered Tommy; and he pushed back his hat.

He always remembered that with a touch of ironical appreciation, for he was passing Brentano's just at that instant, and almost at the same moment his eye was caught by a brown-clad figure that stood in an attitude of reflection before a display window full of books.

JUST an instant he saw that figure! But he was up from his seat like an explosion the next second, knocking off the hat of the man next to him, apologizing for his rudeness, retrieving the headpiece, swinging crazily down the winding ladder to the bus platform—and hurrying back along the motor-jammed curbstone to Twenty-seventh Street.

"Why, Maizie!" he exclaimed, by the entrance.

He caught her just in time.

"Maizie!" he cried. He put his hand on her arm; and she turned and saw him.

"Why—" she began; and stopped. Her face had gone a little white.

"Where are you going?" he asked breathlessly.

"Why, I'm going in here," she said evenly.

"Let me go, too," he said.

He was too dazed to notice the way her hands had clenched.

"Perhaps it would be better not," she said oddly.

"But—but—" he stammered.

A thousand questions were in his mind. How did she happen to be in New York? How long had she been here? What did she do? Was—would she—

The questions overwhelmed him; spent themselves in breathlessness; destroyed all conventional ideas, all thoughts of Diane or Johnny Firth, while he found himself walking with her toward Seventh Avenue, across Broadway; while he heard her say that she was working on a magazine near Forty-second Street, that she only had an hour for lunch, that she had an engagement for dinner, that she really did not see the use of his calling her up . . .

Like trying to fit together broken pieces of pottery their conversation seemed, indeed—pieces flung back and forth between them in the roar and confusion of the city streets, the whole design impossible of recognition because of the clanging street-cars, the honking taxicabs, the pounding trucks and jostling crowds.

And then, almost as if banished by magic, she had said good-by to him and disappeared in the elevator of the Gothic Building, and he was alone in a marble hallway surrounded by strangers. . . .

"But she's in New York!" he told Stork triumphantly, an hour later, in Bertollini's. "I've seen her!"

"Who?" demanded the Stork in astonishment.

"Maizie!"

"Oh!" said the Stork, imperturbably. And he brushed the crumbs off the table, the easier to fill his pipe. "Well, that makes it nice," he added ironically. "You can quarrel some more! And introduce her to Diane!"

"I'm going to do my damnedest to see her," said Tommy.

"I suppose," assented the Stork. He blew great, reflective rings of smoke toward the cracked ceiling.

"Well, why not?" demanded Tommy resentfully.

"I've no objection," returned the painter. "Only—"

"Only what?" demanded Tommy belligerently.

"Women don't drive well in pairs."

"There's no intention—or comparison," retorted Tommy.

And he fell to, on the cheese. . . .

He was sure of that, five days later, as he called for her at her apartment on Ninth

Street, after a final half-hour's telephone argument.

"Maybe I am a nuisance," he had admitted at last. "But I've simply got to see you!"

"Well, all right," she had laughed at last. "It doesn't make that much difference, I'm sure!"

Something in her tone, over the wire, had brought back to him the idyl in a way that had stunned him; reducing to insignificance everything that had happened since that moment in the drawing-room in Cannes, when she had closed the door behind her and he had been left alone, staring at the Mediterranean, hearing the sound of voices in the dark, stone corridor. . . .

He had never met any one at all like her, indeed, he was vividly aware, as they crossed lower Fifth Avenue, spent a breathless moment amid taxis, busses and motors and then joined the throng of hurrying people homeward-bound under the queer lights and shadows of the purple sky—lamps shining golden in the dusk; gray church steeples pointing to the dark clouds; towering apartment houses leaning backward from the shining sidewalks; old-fashioned, square brick houses peering from behind their protecting iron fences up the black cañon to the clustered lights of Murray Hill and, beyond, the purple distance.

There were many faces on this crowded avenue, he realized—but not a one like Maizie's.

Even in the crowded subway station she stood out indefinably, subtly, from the rest of the varied femininity that filled the platforms. It was not, he decided, simply the effect her light, flowered silk dress gave, with its hint of soft grace of figure; nor the smile she gave him, unexpectedly, as a lurch of the train they had boarded transformed him abruptly, for a moment—at City Hall Park—into an old German's last hope and a shopgirl's savior. It was the expression in her eyes.

New York did not produce tenderness like that. It produced ambition, passion, humor, greed, disillusion, pathos, cynicism—such things, perhaps. They could all be found in the eyes that sought Maizie so curiously in the flickering light of the subway car as the train swayed, roared and ground beneath the towering, unseen buildings of lower Broadway and plunged under the river toward Brooklyn. But not tenderness—not that indefinable quality that struck through to a man's heart.

That was the idyllic thing about her, even more pronounced here in the surroundings of Manhattan than it had been under the soft Italian stars, in the shadow of the jumbled roofs. That was the indescribable thing he had not found in anything, anywhere, since that moment in the drawing-room of the Villa Avignon.

How could he ever have confused it, for an instant, with the light that shone in Diane's eyes?

"DO YOU realize," Tommy asked, as they stood on the cool roof of the Hotel Bossert, gazing at the lights of the incredible city and the dark waters of the romantic, ship-traversed bay, "do you realize how many months it is since—since Cannes?"

"Why, of course I realize it," answered Maizie, sitting down at their table, by the shaded lamps.

"And that not a word has passed between us since?"

"Well?" she replied, with her eyes upon the menu.

"Do you still think I'm a skunk?"

"Oh, no!" she said lightly. "I shouldn't be here if I did."

"Thank Heaven for that, anyway," said Tommy. "I never had anything touch me just like—that."

"We were rather theatrical, weren't we? Shan't we order the dinner?"

Strictly unemotional, the two questions were; and uttered in precisely the same tone. But they stirred Tommy unexpectedly, bringing back to him vividly the distant, sunlit Mediterranean and the afternoon sunshine in the Villa Avignon. Was it possible for two human beings to part so emotionally in that sunlit drawing-room with the precise French furniture and then meet again conventionally, five months later—and have the meeting honest? Did she really mean that she had no more feeling than her tone implied?

That had been her attitude ever since he had called her up. Stork, Naida Stewart, Dr. Bigelow, his work—commonplaces about such things and people as these had comprised her conversation. She had just barely answered his questions about his letters, and then had turned the conversation into other channels as soon as possible. She seldom wrote letters, anyway, she had said.

He had been left with a curiously baffled feeling each time he had telephoned her, and had found her busy with engagements, and yet very nice about it, even if rather impersonal. His phone calls, as a matter of fact, had degenerated into a persistent endeavor to get her to come to dinner with him, so that he could really see her.

But she apparently had resolved not to be personal—or else she no longer cared to be!

"Don't you care to discuss it?" he asked.

"What?" she asked.

"Our quarrel."

"I don't see any use," she said, after a barely perceptible pause.

"I never regretted anything so much in my life," he remarked.

"I can imagine it," she answered. She looked down at the table. "I suppose I was mean to let you take it so to heart—perhaps I was to blame, in that."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that you couldn't help it—and I was a little idiot to get so upset about it. I realized that about a week after I tore up your letter. And then I was mean enough not to write you, and tell you how silly I'd been!"

"You weren't silly," said Tommy.

"Why, of course I was!" said Maizie. "To take anything so seriously!"

"Oh!" said Tommy, with a sudden sensation much like that of being struck with an intellectual hammer.

"I thought perhaps it would do you no harm to think about it for a while."

"I suppose I've thought of it a thousand times," said Tommy.

She looked at him with a whimsical smile—the first he had seen since Cannes!

"When you were kissing other girls?" she asked him, with rather clear eyes.

"What makes you think that?"

"Oh, because I've rather an idea that that is the kind of thing you are always getting into. Isn't it?"

"Perhaps," said Tommy, with a slight trace of the wound.

She ought to be sorry for saying that, of course!

"That's what I thought," she concluded, twisting the knife.

"But why hold it against me all this time?" he inquired.

"Because I hate that kind of thing," she said, at last. "And I didn't want to get into any more of it. I—rather liked you on the Riviera. And then you were horrid—like all the others. And I didn't like you any more. And then I found my own heart wasn't broken—and I rather hated myself."

"Ah!" said Tommy at last. "I see." He played with his glass for an instant. "But I did like you, you know," he said. "I meant everything—in my way."

"It just wasn't my way," she said.

He was looking at her hands, remembering the delicate strength of them. So he did not see the swift glance she raised to his face and then withdrew.

"But I've forgotten it all now, anyway. It's past. So let's forget it."

"If you'll forgive me," said Tommy.

"Why, I have—long since," said Maizie, after another barely perceptible pause. "Let's dance!"

THEY danced, while a curious sense of emptiness came to Tommy—a sudden sense of loss, of loneliness, born of the realization that such forgiveness could mean only that the emotion which had inspired the quarrel must have passed away.

She was not in love with him at all—and never had been!

He had been mooning away over a phantom! His conception of her as dying for love of him had been, he admitted, simply ridiculous!

"I'm glad it's turned out this way," he told her after a while. "Really glad."

But he was singularly lacking in elation, he realized of a sudden, as they turned their chairs to see the dancers, and the newcomers who began to crowd the Roof for an evening's entertainment. He felt, in fact, distinctly depressed and rather lonely. Or was it simply piqued? Did he find the discovery a little painful to his vanity? He had not wanted to marry her, five months ago, certainly; he surely did not want to now. What did he want, then? Merely a sop to his vanity?

"Don't you like me any more, at all?" he inquired, a little boyishly.

"Why, of course I do!" she said, instantly.

"I think I like you better than ever," he said at once.

"Because I'm a novelty, after five months," she pointed out.

"No," said Tommy. "You're no novelty to my thoughts."

"But you're not going to make love to me, are you?" she cried, in distress.

"Not if you don't want me to," said Tommy.

"It isn't my wishes! It's that there isn't the slightest necessity!"

"Oh," said Tommy, "you're going to be mean!"

"I'm a very cruel person," she admitted.

"You're a darling," said Tommy.

They danced again, while unexpected emotion came to Tommy and with it a certain sensation of surprise. There could be, indeed, no such adventitious incentive to emotion here on the prosaic roof of the Bossert Hotel as there had been on the Riviera. That sense of blind fate which had woven itself through all his perceptions by the Mediterranean was distinctly lacking here. No apprehension of sudden death, no realization of war's uncertainty, spurred on emotion now to ride at breakneck speed through the night of its desire. Life was no floating bubble now, touched with passionate sunshine, apt to burst at any instant.

Life was much more conventional and ordinary. It was New York and Charlton Court; it was New Canaan and week-end visits; it was Fifth Avenue and Washington Square. It was long hours in the studio, bright afternoons; it was leisurely Sunday breakfasts, with the *Times*, in the Brevoort; it was baseball games at the Polo Grounds, handball in Jimmy's place on the Mews, outdoor concerts at the stadium where Wagner and Tschaikowsky dreamed again among the violins, and the white-clad orchestra gleamed mysteriously with a hundred lights in the dusk, as if a war had never been.

None of the surroundings of the idyl were here.

Yet, somehow, Maizie appeared to him more attractive, more charming, more desirable than ever! She touched his heart in exactly the same way as on the sunset Mediterranean sands! He could take her in his arms and kiss her all over again!

What kind of affection, of emotion, was that?

"STORK," he said abruptly, "led me to think you didn't care ever to see me again."

"I'm afraid I did give him that impression," admitted Maizie. "But you see I was still terribly serious about it all at that time!"

"Oh!" said Tommy. "What made you change?"

"Oh, coming home, I suppose," she said lightly. "Other scenes, things, people. I was awfully in a rut in Cannes—with that hospital, and all those men."

"Home didn't change my feelings," he remarked. "It only intensified them."

"But you weren't upset about it the way I was."

"Almost," said Tommy.

"And then I've always been rather silly about such things."

"It's part of your charm."

"I thank you, sir!"

"Did you ever really go to Italy, motoring?"

"No," she smiled.

"You little villain!" said Tommy.

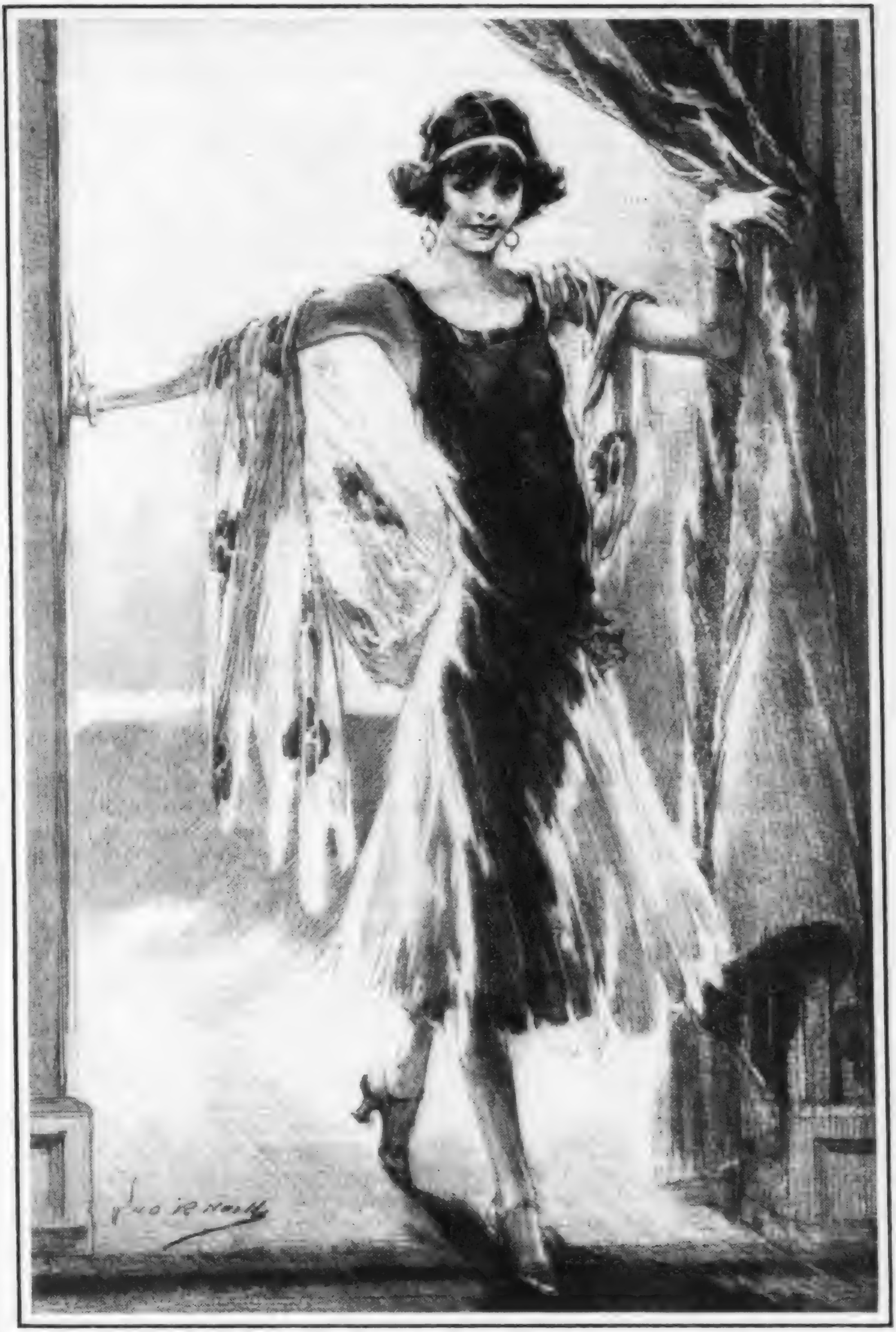
He pulled a rather rueful face while she gave him the briefest of histories of her last few weeks in Cannes and her trip home. She had felt distinctly out of place, it seemed, once she had got back to the house on Highland Drive. Syrchester seemed like an alien city; not the city she had left three years before. She had no enthusiasm for serving in the City Hospital; for spending all her time gossiping with her friends, trying to get back her tennis form, going out to inane dinners where liquor usurped nine-tenths of the conversation and the movies took the rest.

It had all seemed poignantly vacuous, after the war years.

The war had not dealt too gently with the brick business, either.

"That's where most of my income came from, you know," she said. "And Cliff—I guess—had had—a hard time."

That was one of the reasons, indeed, why she had sought a job in New York—she had not had quite enough money. A friend of her father's had got her the chance. She ran a little department, now, called "Heroic Women." It was about women, living and



"If You Should Care for Me" stopped in the music room. "Oh, here you are!" Diane appeared in the doorway where her figure stood outlined against the soft light behind her.

dead, whose lives had had vision and helpfulness in them.

She liked it.

"It's really rather absorbing, in a way," she said, "—except for the Sundays. That's the only day when I realize that I don't really like New York—when I really miss Syrchester, and Sunday dinner, and the nice peace and quiet of Washington Avenue after two o'clock."

Sometimes, indeed, she admitted, it seemed as if she could not stand it another hour unless she could tramp across meadows, stand in the cool shade of woods, smell the flowers along the brooks, fling herself upon the piquant summer grass, hear some kind of bird, singing to himself in the sunshine.

"Fifth Avenue and the Plaza and Central Park can't make up to me for that," she said. "I've spent the last two Sundays going out on Long Island to Oyster Bay and those wooded hills and the Indian and heretic hunters' graves."

"Alone?" said Tommy.

"Oh, no!" she said. "With Dr. Firth. He's your Dr. Firth, by the way!"

"Johnny?" exclaimed Tommy.

"He's always singing your praises."

"That's like Johnny," said Tommy, with a curious feeling in his heart. "We were roommates in Cambridge, you know."

"That's what he said."

"I WAS on my way to look him up, that day I saw you in front of Brentano's."

"He'll be awfully glad to see you. He said he had rather lost track of you since 1914."

"Where did you meet him?"

"Mr. Gresham, my editor, has a kind of tea thing, Sundays, sometimes. I met him there about a month ago."

"I see," said Tommy.

A month ago, it occurred to him—a month ago! Just about the time he was going out to Rhinebeck, and Diane—

"Let's dance again," he said abruptly.

They did, while a curious feeling of self-contempt invaded him, leaving in its wake intense dissatisfaction and a vivid perception of the egotistical character of his view of Maizie until now.

Why, she was no shy, unseen flower that had bloomed only for him on a distant Mediterranean shore! She had other friends—Johnny Firth, this Bert Woodward she mentioned in Syrchester, Henry Turner—she enjoyed a whole life with which he was unacquainted, despite the intimacy of the vanished idyl! Just as he himself did! She had not simply been drooping, waiting for him to pass by once more!

His whole conception of their relations had been an overwrought one.

The truth apparently was that he had been an extremely disturbing factor in her existence for the brief space of three weeks, at the most! And now he no longer disturbed her, at all!

Despite her avowal of affection, he had not begun to hold the same place in her thoughts which she had held in his.

"IT'S really all a tremendous joke on me," he told her, a little ruefully. "I suppose I've lain awake a hundred nights over you."

"Really?"

"Truly."

"I'm sorry for that," she said softly.

"It's a bit of a shock to find myself relegated to such an extremely minor rôle!"

"But terribly chastening," she pointed out.

"It's a distinct step toward perfection, viewed in that light," he admitted.

"And enough for one evening, I think," she said.

"Meaning?"

"That it's late—and we'd better be going. I have to work in the morning, you know. I'm not a sculptor!"

"All right," said Tommy.

They went, side by side, in silence, Tommy just restraining himself from taking her arm as they descended to the subway in the huge, solemn elevator and finally taking it as they shot under the unseen river with the familiar roar and clang and bang of swift transportation—above them the flaunting virtues of the colored advertisements, and beside them, crowded into the steel cars, all the press of perfumed, powdered, indescribably varied humanity which fills the subway at night.

Silent, perforce, he was. But inside him there was a babel of emotion—a curious, breathless tenderness; a poignant, stifled regret; a dim recognition all over again, of that impression of something fine which she gave him; and, overwhelming all, a new perception of her charm and touching loveliness.

Why, indeed, had he not loved her from the beginning, while there yet had been an opportunity to win her? Why had he not loved her that night in Cannes?

Vain regrets, of course!

Yet the soft, cool, night streets of New York brought back vividly the whole thing. Just such a night as this when they had gone home at last. Belated victorias, of course, passing slowly on the velvety black promenade, instead of blaring, solitary taxicabs on Fifth Avenue; the swish of waves on the shore, instead of footfalls on the deserted length of Twelfth Street; the Ritz Carlton instead of the Brevoort, quiet now with after-midnight stillness. But otherwise the same.

Surely, he had been very close to love in that breathless moment of enchantment when she had pressed her lips to his in the shadow of the doorway! Both of them—no matter what she said now!

Had she forgotten that?

Or did tonight bring it back to her, as it did to him?

"I've really had a very nice time," she began, on the steps outside her apartment house.

But Tommy took both her hands impulsively.

"It might be Cannes over again, mightn't it?" he said, with a kind of stammer in his voice. He wished with all his heart that it was, too, just then; and that the long months in between could be blotted out forever!

But Maizie hesitated only an instant.

"Yes, it might be," she said. "But—"

"But what?" he asked.

"But it isn't!" she smiled. "It's New York!"

She took her hands from his and ran up the steps. . . .

"WHAT do you hear from Diane?" Stork asked him three weeks later.

"Oh, nothing much," said Tommy shortly.

And he fell to, once more, on "Happiness."

He was beginning, by that time, to hate the appearance of those square, gray envelopes, with the bold superscription and the English stamps. They were so clearly a reminder of his facility for being pleasant and easy with life. A steamer letter, first; and then regularly every five days, a missive from England or the Continent. That had been their history so far. But their effect upon him had been out of all proportion to their contents or length.

There was nothing deep-seated nor serious about them. They were merely impulsive, disconnected notes; colored by the mood of the instant; filled with almost unintelligible details of teas in Oxford, suitors in Sussex, parties on Channel steamers, adorers in Paris. But underneath the distinctly modern phraseology of most of them there was usually a veiled promise of a thrill of some sort, or at least a reminder of Aunt Jocelyn's and the passionate embrace.

Like a mouse that moves in the wall of a house at night, while its occupants try to dream sweetly—now a scratch, now silence, now again the unpleasant disturbance! That was what they were like to Tommy. And he hated the days of their regular appearance.

Once or twice, indeed, with one of them in his hand, he had considered sending an answer in return which would end the correspondence forever. Emotion, he had assured himself, was a thing easily assumed and as easily cast aside by Patterson Shirley's daughter. Only extraordinary vanity could imagine that a deep, abiding passion lay beneath what had passed between them. Why did he not do it?

Each time, however, he had procrastinated until it was too late. The idea had, somehow, seemed repugnant to him. There surely was something rather gratuitously insulting about informing a girl who had said she was in love with you that you no longer missed her nor cared to receive her letters, simply because a more attractive girl had come upon the scene. A man's time, surely, could be employed toward a happier result in paying more attention to the girl who had been so long neglected and who now presented such a disquieting problem.

For Maizie unquestionably did present a problem.

He had realized that fact before a week had elapsed—mostly during the Saturday and Sunday he had spent in New Canaan with his family, as a result of the discovery that Maizie and Johnny Firth were planning two country picnics on those days.

The first thing he had done, indeed, upon his return, had been to call up Johnny, feeling self-conscious because he had not done so before—and with an unpleasantly clear realization, too, that Johnny had not seen fit to call him up, either.

"I meant to, you know," he had told the old Elephant, in the darkened study of the church, south of Washington Square.

"Of course you meant to," Johnny had responded. "You always do. That is the only thing your friends are ever certain of—that you're somewhere, doing something impulsive, and meaning, shortly, to do something else!"

"But in this case I didn't want to bother you over the week-end!"

"Oh, I see!" Johnny had grinned. "Well, I appreciate that!"

And they had plunged into the tale of their experiences since last they had seen each other.

Johnny had been the same good old Elephant; a little worn down by the years, perhaps; not quite so sanguine of an immediate millennium; with slightly altered views on the mixture of circumstances which had landed him in the church—but otherwise the same, and with the same old combination of humor, idealism and flaming faith that had always distinguished him even in college days.

"The older I become, the more I grow convinced of it, too," he had said in the dim light of the study. "It's the only motive power that doesn't burn out in a man, that becomes stronger with age—a faith in the purpose of creation, in something higher and better than the things of today. I suppose it's ingrained in me along with oatmeal and the Bible for breakfast and the Pennsylvania hills at dawn! But I'm thankful it is. I found it endlessly inspiring, talking to labor in the shipyards during the last year of the war.

"IT'S what makes this job down here so absorbing, too. It's the new frontier of democracy, you know, in these crowded tenement streets. I'm having the fight of my life!"

He had lit his pipe, with his old, slow, all-embracing grin, and they had repaired to the Brevoort for a little lunch and something cool.

Yes; Johnny had been just the same—as keen for his job among New York's immigrants as he had been for the Wyoming church; as amusing in his estimate of his ability to handle it as he had been about his selling genius that college vacation when he had gone off selling kitchen ware to farmer's wives; as quietly determined to succeed in it as he had been in the Chautauqua work which he had undertaken at nineteen.

They had had one of their fine, old evenings together.

But the single inescapable impression Tommy had carried away had been of a real intimacy between the Elephant and Maizie—an intimacy of no small proportions and of growing strength.

He had gone home to Charlton Court, indeed, with a sudden, vivid realization of his own slight stature compared to Johnny's—and of the appeal his old roommate must have for a girl. Such a man, of course, held an attraction for a girl like Maizie that he could never wield. He would make her happier, too, in the end. There were no capricious Dianes in Johnny's scheme of things!

This was the answer, most likely, to the disappearance of the idyl, so far as Maizie was concerned. And it was right!

TOMMY had spent an unsettled week, indeed, after that evening with Johnny, and had refrained quite consciously from calling up Maizie, until Saturday. Then he had found her busy with a friend from Syrchester—Bert Woodward, again—and the irony of his whole past conception of their relations had been clear to him. And he had gone out—whether as a direct result or not, he could not quite decide—on a gay party with Jimmy and Stork, and viewed himself with exceeding grimness, and a measure of uncertainty which had increased rather than diminished during the days which had followed.

Those first three weeks, indeed, had been upsetting for him. He had not been sure of anything, after the third week began, not even of the positive reality of that kiss and quarrel and idyl in distant Cannes. He had been positive only of the vivid strength of his own emotion for a girl who had apparently forgotten now that she ever had inspired it.

That conviction had grown upon him apace.

One by one the palaces of upper Fifth Avenue had closed their shutters, and glared blankly at the populace that swarmed down of a Sunday from Harlem. One by one the movie theaters had drawn on their summer coats, and offered music and cool darkness to the aimless, bored crowds. The Midnight Frolic had opened on the roof of the New Amsterdam. The Provincetown Players had closed and left their brick tenement-lined street to the shrill voices of dirty-faced children and the roar of the Elevated. On Sunday, open cars had clanged the almost deserted length of Sixth Avenue, with scarce a stop except for patently arrayed churchgoers and the scattered groups of Sunday workers.

August had swept upon Manhattan.

BUT he stayed on. He had gone over and played a little handball in Jimmy's studio, off the Mews; and got too hot and taken a shower, and read a new volume of Dunsany's in his pajamas. He had sent off a completed model to Patterson Shirley, and written his mother, rather ruefully, that he was exceptionally busy but would get up to New Canaan next week. He had finished the medallions of Diane and Gloria, rather grimly, and had gone down to the Mauritanian Building with Stork to view the progress of the frescoes. He had attended a rather maudlin party of the Vanity Club where there had been much talk of the coming dusk of the gods, Prohibition.

And then he had called up Maizie again and taken her to the Claremont for dinner, and come home with a trembling ecstasy in his heart that had swept away forever the last vestige of doubt. Why, she was adorable, she was wonderful! He had loved her from the very first! What had been the matter with him that he had not recognized that before? He would not confess himself defeated until the last—absolutely the last!—ray of hope had been extinguished.

"Not if there are twenty-five Woodwards and Johnnys around!" he exclaimed, as he climbed the stairs now in Charlton Court.

And he opened and read—with a decided mixture of feelings—Diane's fifth letter from London—opened it, read it, and cast it from him, and went to work again upon "Happiness." . . .

Somewhat later, indeed, he saw that for him that had been the whole story of that particular summer in New York. "Happiness," Maizie—and, at a distance, Diane. There were few weeks when he did not receive a note of some kind from Diane. There was scarcely an evening when he did not see Maizie. And there was not an hour of daylight when he did not work upon "Happiness."

It was partly, of course, because he realized that the fountain was all that stood between him and the bog of poverty anew, and he knew he must succeed and regain again the position from which the war had pushed him. That was partly why he worked so hard. But the rest, he always thought afterward, was Maizie. Maizie, and money; Maizie, and independence; Maizie, and love and marriage! Without her, both as a spur and as a protection, he could never have finished both the fountain and the Rhinebeck panels so soon.

Once fall had come, too, and he realized his blindness, there were few nights when he did not seek her out on one pretext or another. No—he told Jimmy and Stork—he could not go on any parties. He must be at work soon after dawn. And anyway he had an engagement with Maizie until ten o'clock; and then he must be going home to bed.

"So as to save your strength for fall and Diane, I suppose," Stork said ironically.

"You've got a devilish ingenuity for bothering a man," he answered the Stork. "That's completely over, so far as I am concerned!" And he sought out Maizie at once.

"Let me steal some more of your time," he begged her.

They went to Aunt Clemmy's to dinner, just as the night before they had gone to the Brevoort and the night after they went down to Pell Street and chop suey in Chinatown.

IT WAS a much clearer image of her which he had by that time, indeed, and one which showed him that there was no comparison possible between her and Diane. An hour with Diane, and a man saw a world of shifting shadows, lit only by the flame of her desires. An hour with Maizie, and he was willing to set off to the ends of the earth with her, absolutely sure of her loyalty and truth, her courage and sincerity, touched to the soul by the dream in her eyes and the childishly passionate tenderness of her.

The realization sank into his soul with every hour of the summer and fall as she painted her portrait on his heart and he loved her.

"I wish to the deuce I hadn't ever seen Diane," he confessed to Stork.

"It's unfortunate to be an Apollo," agreed the Stork.

But Tommy did not smile.

He was experiencing the pangs of regret—and wondering if he had really any chance with Maizie, after all!

It was a curious reserve, indeed, that appeared to characterize her relations with him. There was intimacy between them, friendship, too, and even affection. He could swear to that. She did not avoid him. She appeared to enjoy their evenings. But there was always an odd unseen bar beneath the waters that prevented him from entering the harbor of personalities.

She seemed to assume the position of some whimsical mentor, whenever he allowed emotion to influence him. Oh, no, he could not possibly mean that! Not an hour from now! And as for a week! No one could tell.

She was light and amusing about it. Yet she meant it, in a way, he was quite sure. There was a clear light in her brown eyes, sometimes, that did not smile nearly so much as did her tender lips. And she could be peremptory, if he made love to her without thinking—as sometimes happened.

"Don't say things you'll be sorry for, Tommy! Not every one knows you as I do!"

For some minutes there might be silence—until he refused any longer to rest under the imputation, and declared that he meant it and he did not care how ridiculous she tried to make it appear!

"Of course you mean it now! That's just the dreadful part!" she would point out to him. "But tomorrow you may think you were just impulsive! Or simply amiable."

"All right," he would say sulkily. "I don't mean anything, then."

"That's better!" She would clap her hands.

And another evening would have passed. . . .

He did mean it, nevertheless, he was telling himself a little fiercely nights when he went to bed in the little bedroom off the studio—he meant every word of it. He was absolutely sure of that now. He had been sure of it that day in Wanamaker's, when the large florid man in front of them had pushed aside the little old lady from the elevator and Maizie had deliberately walked on his heels as they entered the car, muttering "Pig! Pig! Pig!" as she did so. He had been sure of it that noon in the studio when she had come in the door quite out of breath and asked him to lend her a quarter for the little ragamuffin she had just seen staring into the bakery window on Sixth Avenue, his nose pressed to the glass as if to sniff the fresh, crisp doughnuts that lay within.

She touched his heart as nothing in his life had ever done.

Why would she not believe him? Just because of a moment on the distant Riviera, in the springtime of their friendship?

IT WAS a pleasant succession of restaurants to which he took her, indeed, in pursuit of that elusive doubt which lay in her heart. Aunt Clemmy's, where the darkies served them in the whitewashed, old-fashioned basement by the big fireplace, and the lady at the desk talked of Presbyterianism and Dr. Fosdick's sermons; the Coq d'Or, where the little tables and the mirrors and the tureen of *potage* served amid the chatter of French reminded them of San Rafael and Cannes; Madame's, where the aroma of Parmesan cheese pervaded subtly the cool shadows of the secluded back yard; the Claremont, where the sweet breeze from the New Jersey hills caressed the lights of the battleship fleet, at anchor in the river.

He took her to all those places, and many others. Superlative chop-suey palaces in Pell Street; Armenian restaurants in Lexington Avenue where Turkish coffee and broiled lamb on skewers made up the menu; weird little Russian places south of Bleecker Street; quaint cafés in Grand Street where Tommy jabbered in outlandish jargons with black-bearded Hebrews and Greek priests who had ancient treasures of art to show him; and sometimes, late at night, Ugobono's, where the Elevated thundered past and Maizie was so sorry for the one damp-browed waiter that half the time she would not order any Strumoni for herself and so was obliged to eat half of Tommy's!

All these places saw his efforts—and saw love come in his heart.

"WHO'S the golden-haired child, Titan?" Plinty asked him, late in October. Wrapped up in psychoanalysis she was, just then, and engaged in studying Tommy, her husband, two children and friends in the light of that new and blinding discovery—and Titan was her name for her brother: The Great Unconscious Force.

"Maizie's no child," Tommy retorted sharply.

"I saw you at the theater last night. It looked to me as if you needed a chaperon."

"Thank God you're too busy to be one."

"Perhaps I'd better have her up to tea—and report to the family!"

"Not if I know it," exclaimed Tommy. "I'm not going to have her used for psychoanalytic experiments! Repress your curiosity—and see what happens!"

He stalked off, reminded rather vividly of the extent to which his emotions had become engaged—and of the total ignorance of his family on the subject.

"I suppose I'd better have Plinty meet her," he told Stork. "Or Heaven only knows what sort of wild tale she'll tell the family!"

"Are you as interested as that?" inquired the Stork.

"I am," stated Tommy.

He gave a Dutch supper—international, Stork called it, because Gigi served it in his best Sicilian style—a supper to which Jimmy came, and Lawrence, and Plinty and Maizie, and Stork brought Geraldine Faulkner; and a pleasant time was had by all.

"And I really think even Plinty couldn't find anything the matter with Maizie," he told the Stork as they sat, surrounded by the dishes and bottles.

"Nor can your friend Johnny Firth," Stork commented. "I heard him ask her to go to the opera with him, as soon as it starts."

"They're very thick," admitted Tommy.

He went to bed with an absolute, positive jealousy—and awoke, next morning to find Diane's thirteenth letter waiting for him.

HE NEVER forgot that thirteenth letter of Diane's. Not that there was anything very startling in it. There wasn't. It was simply the last one:

Dear Tommy Dumdum:

I'm coming home, like a bad penny—or as an evil deed? I can't remember. But we're sailing in two weeks, anyway! And I'm not mad. I've had a wonderful time, of course! You know me, Al! Oh, these Oxford cuties! But me for little old New York and some real life when the snowshoes chirp! Meet Me Where the Willows Kiss the Pond! Words and Music by Diane Shirley, dedicated to T. Dumdum, first performance (by request), Thanksgiving at New Canaan, Conn.

Yours,

DIANE.

P. S. You're going to be home to welcome the Fair Stranger, aren't you? The family are to stay over Thanksgiving with your estimable forbears. Do not let me waste my sweetness on the desert air!

That was all the letter said. But it brought Tommy up short. "Diane says she's coming home," he told the Stork.

"You didn't expect her to spend her life in Europe, did you?" replied the painter calmly.

"It's going to be infernally unpleasant," said Tommy gloomily.

"Take my advice, for once," said Stork unsmilingly, "and kick her right in the face! I don't trust her."

"It's a doubtful picture—for me to paint," said Tommy.

"I know it is," said the Stork. "That's exactly the trouble with you. You lack guts. You're always considering this and thinking that, and trying not to hurt this person and that person—wrapping the world in cotton wool!"

"Oh, hell, Stork!" said Tommy angrily. "Diane is a perfectly all right person, you know!"

"She's a female."

"She's just an impulsive child."

"More impulse than child, I guess!"

"You don't know her," said Tommy.

He took himself off, aware once more of the cynicism with which Stork viewed existence, and convinced of its error. There was no reason why he and Diane should not be friends, indeed. Being abominable to people was a poor way of atoning for one's own past mistakes. He should never have kissed Diane, of course. She had a full quota of feelings and emotions. She was a human being and a reasonable person. She might be a trifle piqued when he refused any longer to play a rôle in her passionate comedy. But it would strike no deeper.

Above all, it would not be necessary to bring Maizie into the affair—which was what Stork meant by kicking her in the face. To do that not only would hurt Diane's pride but might subject Maizie to intimations and slights and sarcasm from his family—when, Heaven knew, she was anything but eager to become a Dumbarton!

The best thing was to be decent—and not let his relations with Diane drift into intimacy again. That was the decent thing. . . .

"I'LL have to go up home for Thanksgiving," he told Maizie, the second week in November. "I just had another letter from mother."

"Of course you'll have to go," said Maizie. "I wouldn't let you stay in New York for anything."

In the Westchester woods, where they sat cooking their picnic dinner in the clear, golden afternoon, she looked at him rather oddly, although there was no thought of Diane in her mind.

"I must go home to Syrchester myself," she said. "I meant to tell you some time ago. But I hated to."

"I'll miss you," he admitted.

"I didn't mean because of that," she said in a low voice. "It's because of Cliff. I've never really told you about him—and me. That's why I put it off."

"What's the matter with Cliff?"

"He—hasn't done very well, with the estate—the brick business. I told you—remember?—that that was partly why I came down here for a job. Well, there were—funny—things, too. I didn't find out about them until I'd been home a month or two."

"Oh!" said Tommy.

"That's why Bert Woodward comes to see me. He's cashier of the trust company. He and Judge Robbins have been trying to protect my part of it. I haven't ever told anybody, of course, because—"

"Of course," said Tommy at once.

"But Bert's letter this morning"—she picked at the grass—"says that Cliff has gone somewhere."

"Gone somewhere?"

"Disappeared."

"Good Godfrey!" exclaimed Tommy.

"Oh, I think it's just disappearance," she said swiftly, "not anything worse. He went day before yesterday." Her lips trembled a little. "It makes me feel awfully queer. He's my—brother, you know." She looked up at Tommy abruptly. "Do you think there is anything queer about me?" she asked.

"What on earth!"

"Because he didn't tell me anything about it! Don't you think it's funny—that he never confided in me, never came to me, never said to me 'Maizie dear, I'm in trouble'? Never told me anything! Just went on and on alone, and kept everything to himself, as if I were a stranger? I'm not mean. I wouldn't have cared if he had lost every dollar mother left us. But I never knew anything about it at all—from the day I came home until Bert called me into his office in the bank one day and told me. And there isn't anything bad about Cliff. There never has been. He's just weak. I remember when we were children he took a dollar bill from the collection plate at St. Luke's once on a bet—and he treated every boy within reach to ice-cream soda with it! He just couldn't resist the chance to be a good fellow. I never had any fights with him. We were perfectly good friends. He isn't a thief—or anything like that."

She stared down at her hands.

"Don't you think it's odd?"

"Yes," said Tommy. "With you for a sister."

"I didn't have anything to do with the business thing, either. But he looked at me so oddly in the bank, as if I were to blame. He had almost a hunted expression. There was something horrible about the whole thing to me. Bert meant for the best, of course. So did Judge Robbins. They were looking out for me—and Bert had to think of his bank. But it was like a kind of nightmare—the same Cliff who had played with me under the lilac bushes on Highland Drive—who'd sat opposite me at dinner so many nights, after mother and father died. Do you see what I mean?"

"I see," said Tommy.

"Bert felt funny, too, I think. He spoke to me as Cliff went down the steps into Main Street. 'I hope you won't hate me,' he said. But I didn't hate him. I could only think of Cliff and his dollar bill in the plate at St. Luke's. That was all I was thinking of when I caught him just outside the saloon on the corner. But he jerked his arm away from me. 'Sure, you're perfect!' he said. And he went in."

She hid her face in her hands.

"I'm not perfect," she whispered.

Something came in Tommy's throat.

"You're damn near it," he said.

He stood up suddenly, aware as if for the first time of the quiet and peace of the cool November twilight, the fading purple of the woods, the figure of a girl beside him by the dying embers of the fire—and in the distance the sweep of valleys and fields below the pasture on whose edge he stood.

"I love you," he said.

He did not unclench his hands. He sat down in front of her.

"I love you, Maizie," he said.

"Maybe." Her voice was still half a whisper.

He leaned forward and took her in his arms. "Maizie!"

"Please don't," she said.

"I love you."

"I can't always fight you," she cried. Her own hands were tightly clasped.

"Why should you?" he asked.

"Because I'm not—sure," she said. "You're nice, Tommy. But—"

"But what?" he demanded.

"I think you're my—temptation."

"I'm your lover," he said.

"For how long?"

"Forever," he said. "If you'll have me."

A mighty wave of conviction overwhelmed him.

"You do love me!" he said passionately. "Kiss me."

She picked at the threads in his coat, her eyes downcast.

"Do you think you'll still love me a year from today?"

"I know it!" he replied passionately.

An odd little smile stole across her face.

"Well, maybe you can kiss me—in a year," she announced.

"And now, too!" he cried.

"Just one—maybe!" she whispered.

And he did. . . .

TO NEW CANAAN, in late fall, there come occasionally soft, velvet nights, in whose pale moonlight and mild breezes there still lingers something of the vanished summer. In the high ponds, the grandpa frogs still croak. In the fields brave crickets still slowly draw their bow. Across the sky moths flit temperamentally, as if to say that snow and the rigors of a New England winter may be on the way, but summer still can hold the stage.

It was such a night that Tommy gazed on, two weeks later, from the terrace of the house in Primrose Lane.

Behind him, Diane in the music room played with careless swing and abandon a London music-hall favorite, humming the air lightly—to Stork!—as if quite unaware of the affront she was offering the green volumes of Chopin, Wagner, and Debussy which lay in piled confusion on the gleaming piano. From the drawing-room there came that burst of talk and laughter which usually proclaims the finish of an exciting hand of bridge. From the lighted pantry window the sound of silver clinking upon dishes aroused memories of long-past parties and the golden age of childhood—as if to emphasize the gulf that lay between the simplicity of youth and the complexity of age.

So far, he had been alone with Diane but once. Just after lunch, he had closed the Stork's door and gone down the quiet hallway toward his own room. She had been just closing the door to her mother's room, one hand upon the knob, the other holding her kimono about her.

"Hello, Dumdum!" she had said.

She had glanced down the hall for a second and then kissed him swiftly and fled, leaving him vividly aware of the unchanged state of her heart.

Since then the rigid social schedule by which his mother entertained her guests had circumscribed her. The garden at three-thirty; the terrace view at four; the old mill at four-thirty, the barns at five, tea immediately after, and so to rest and dress for dinner on the stroke of seven.

That was the schedule—and even Diane had been bound by its iron succession of events. He had not been left alone with her again. Plinty had entertained them through most of the round. Stork had done his ridiculous card tricks at tea time. And Patterson Shirley had taken every one for a short stroll afterward.

Now, however, "If You Should Care for Me" stopped abruptly in the music room and Tommy threw away his cigarette, straightening his shoulders unconsciously. The thing could not be put off forever, of course!

"Oh, here you are!"

It was Diane's voice, from the doorway, where her figure stood outlined against the soft light behind her, while her face remained in shadow—an even deeper shadow because of the moonlight that drenched the lawn.

"Hello," he said.

"I left my cigarette case out here somewhere."

"Really?"

"By the sundial, I think."

"I'll go get it—"

"I think I know where it is!"

"Just wait a second, Di—"

"I'd adore a stroll, anyway!"

"All right!"

Complaisant acceptance in Tommy's tone—and yet unhappy distaste in his heart; there could be no possible pleasure in this interview!

"It's gorgeous, isn't it?" she said—she, who never noticed scenery of any kind!

Banal phrases, of course! Meant for other ears!

Neither of them appeared to notice the fact, however. Not until they reached the sundial, in its ring of cedars, and Diane sat upon the little rock seat below the dead tiger lilies and looked up at Tommy unconcernedly.

"There isn't any use making them think we just hate each other, is there?" she asked.

He grinned; with relief partly—partly at her directness.

"Why, there hasn't been anything so—"

"Oh, tush! You've been just as—funny—as you can be!"

He stood looking down at her in silence.

"Aren't you going to sit down?"

"I thought your case—"

"I've got my cigarette case, bright one—of course."

"Oh!" he said. And he sat down, looking at his hands.

"What's the matter?" she inquired.

"Why, nothing!" he answered.

"ARE you trying to hurt my feelings?" she asked.

"Anything but that, Di," he said.

"I thought you'd at least be glad to see me."

"I am," he protested.

"Like a patient and his dentist," she said scornfully.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing you don't want to," she said coldly.

"I'm not trying to be mean."

"You aren't hurting my feelings in the least!"

"You sound as if I were."

"It's nothing in my life."

"There isn't any use in quarreling—Diane."

"You're just as horrid as you can be."

"I haven't said anything—"

"You don't have to."

In the silence she stretched out her silken ankles and looked at them.

"Don't let's fight again, Dumdum," she said.

He felt her put her hand upon his arm, and a sudden distaste for his evasions seized him.

"I don't want to," he said. There was no honor, indeed, in hiding behind pitiful excuses—no manhood in cheap subterfuge. "I'm just rather off—anything but friendship."

"Friendship!" she cried hotly.

"You're only twenty-one, Diane. You'll probably regret this whole thing some day—and hate me. I ought to be a good enough friend to point that out—"

"Oh, friend!" she exclaimed again contemptuously—perhaps because beneath his words unerring intuition showed her something beyond the things he said. "I don't want that! You've been getting a lot of ideas, again! Haven't you?"

"No," he said.

"I can't help acting the way I feel," she said in a low tone.

Of a sudden she seemed very childish, very young, very tender.

"I just can't help it," she repeated. And she turned and buried her face on his shoulder. "You know, it comes over me in great waves, sometimes. I don't know what is the matter with me. You make me feel so funny."

"But this isn't lasting love—not your real one, Diane," said Tommy, a little desperately.

"I don't care," she cried. "I want it—whatever it is!"

"Why, Di!" he said. "You're crazy!"

HE TOOK her arms and twisted her until her face was toward his and he could see the iris in her eyes. A full minute he held her thus, and then, of a sudden, she put her arms about his neck and closed her eyes.

"Do just give me one kiss, before we go back," she whispered. "That can't hurt anything."

She kissed him, while desperation filled him at the touch of her lips—at the intoxication of her flushed cheeks, her embrace, her half-parted lips; at the memories they roused—Rhinebeck, Aunt Jocelyn's—

"We've got to go in," he said.

"There isn't any rush," she answered, looking up at him.

"The family will know something's afoot," he said.

"Let 'em!" she retorted.

"But, Diane!" he protested.

"Are you ashamed of me?" she asked with sudden passion.

"You know that isn't so!" he retorted in some irritation—irritation because of the genius she had for putting him in the wrong, and also because of the clear danger that some one might come out from the house and find them quarreling now, with Diane's hair in disarray and plain evidences of emotion upon them.

"Then why do you care?" she demanded abruptly.

"Because it isn't done—in this house," he retorted.

"Then why did you ever do it?" she asked.

"Well, all right," he said harshly. Anger came to him for the first time with Diane. "I won't do it any more," he said.

He turned and left her—and ran plump into his father, on the stone steps beyond the cedars. . . .

TOMMY never forgot that unexpected meeting—principally because of the sharp question that swept his mind as his father stopped abruptly and looked at him with his oddly piercing eyes.

"Hallo!" he said.

"What's Diane off to?" inquired his father.

"Stork, I guess," he said, with an effort at carelessness.

"I gave him my hand at bridge."

"She can amuse herself."

"I thought we might get in a minute. Mr. Shirley tells me you've finished his fountain."

There seemed to be no sign of anything unusual in his tone.

"Yes," said Tommy.

"Let's have a cigar."

No; he betrayed no sign of having heard, Tommy thought as he turned with him toward the library—and yet—and yet—it was impossible to tell about his father. He seldom said much. Those books behind his reading lamp, where he lit his cigar now, were good evidence of that: Thomas Hooker, Jonathan Edwards, Phillips Brooks, "Christianity and the Social Crisis," "Christ in Industry" and a dozen others. He had never mentioned them until the day he had brought forth his profit-sharing plan for the Dumbarton Mills and the employees had given him that dinner in the Town Hall. But they had been in his mind for years. He was inscrutable in a way.

"Have you got the model with you?"

"No, I didn't bring anything."

"A vacation, eh?"

"Yes."

"What is it—that same idea? The figure, and the birds?"

"Yes."

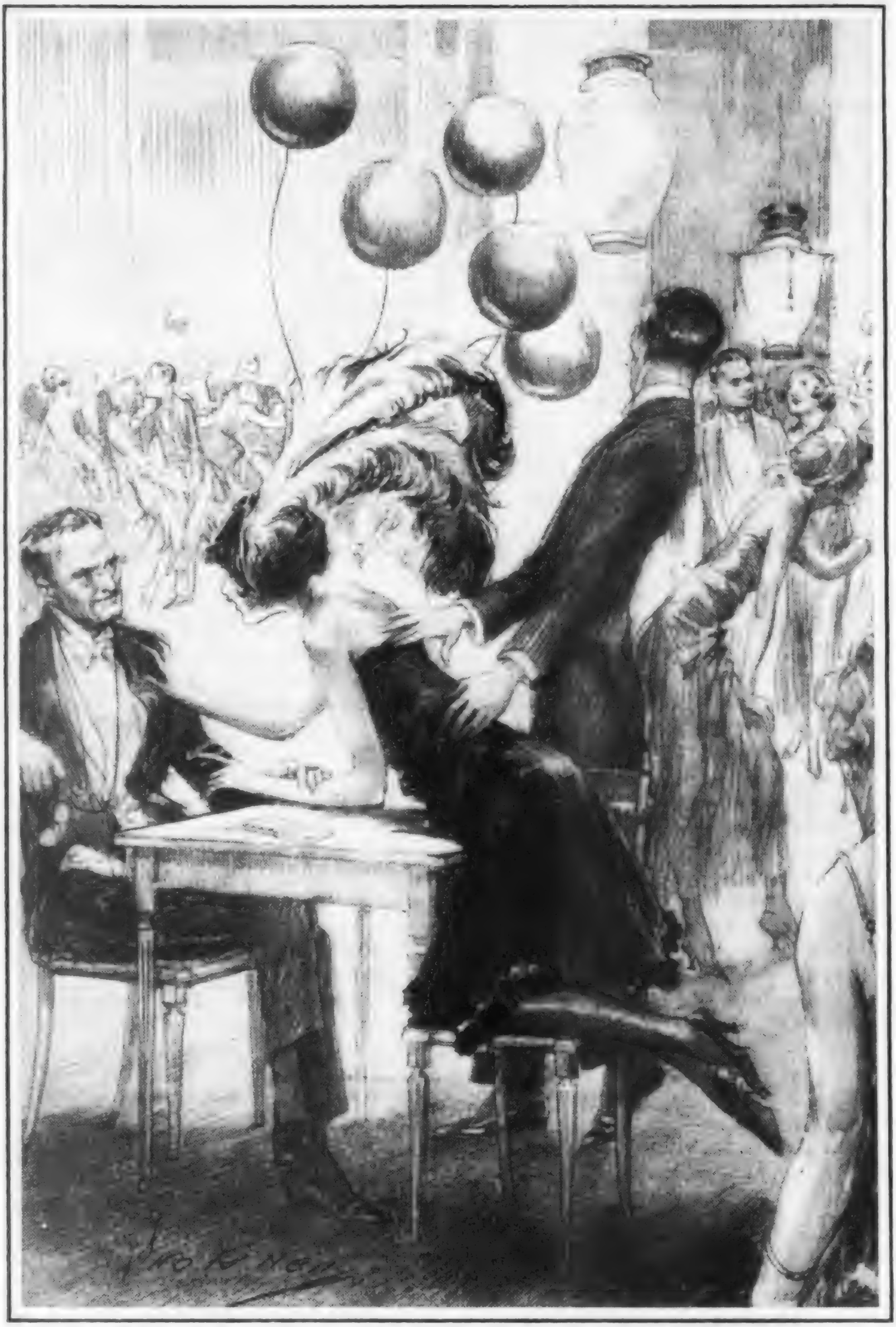
"Do you like it?"

"Yes," said Tommy. "I really think it's pretty good."

"Mr. Shirley said he hoped to get it in this fall."

"Too late, I'm afraid," said Tommy.

A measure of calmness was beginning to come to him as he sat in the well-remembered divan opposite his father's reading chair. Evidently his father thought nothing, had heard nothing—the quarrel was going to pass off unnoticed; or would if Diane did not do something to bring it before every one.



"You won't tell on me, will you?" said Diane. "I was crazy to wear it!" And she whispered: "Don't tell on me and I won't tell on you, sometime!"

"Diane doesn't seem to like it too well, does she?" said his father.

"Oh, doesn't she?"

"Well, you know how she is. Like all this new generation—interested in herself. But I gathered—as well as you can, from her—that it didn't particularly strike her."

"I don't think things like that do," said Tommy.

"You've got to know her quite well, haven't you?"

"Oh, to a certain extent."

"What do you think of her?"

"Oh, she's a typical débutante, I suppose."

He tried to sound careless; but he was not sure he succeeded. His father looked at him so steadily!

"Did I tell you my own little adventure with her last winter?"

"You?" Tommy grinned a little.

"Yes. Plinty took me in to one of her late dances—the Plaza. I imagine it was a débutante affair. Anyway Diane was there—in the latest of headdresses and the shortest of skirts. She saw me and came up with some fuzzy-haired youth. 'You won't tell on me, will you?' she said. 'I was crazy to wear it!' And she whispered in my ancient ear: 'Don't tell on me and I won't tell on you, sometime! That's a dear!' And danced off."

He knocked the ashes off his cigar.

"Partners in crime, I suppose!"

"It sounds like her," said Tommy.

"It made me wonder just how she must act with these boys her own age."

"Oh, they're all that way, I guess," said Tommy.

"It's a poor point of view," said John Dumbarton. "At sixteen or sixty."

"Yes, I think it is," said Tommy uncomfortably.

"It made me wonder if she had tried anything on you."

"Oh, she's all right—"

"MAYBE," said John Dumbarton slowly, "I am mistaken. Things look very differently to sixty—and thirty. But it rather struck me that you might be interested in Diane—a little. And it wouldn't do any harm to bring up the subject—so you could reflect on it. It's a thing the Dumbartons aren't noted for: reflection. It seems to be an autumn blossom with us—or has been with me, anyway."

He stared at his cigar.

"Your mother, of course, seems very fond of her," he continued. "Perhaps because she doesn't see beyond Patterson Shirley—and Rhinebeck—and Sleepy Hollow; that sort of thing. But there are some things women don't understand, particularly women like your mother. One of them is women like Diane, and the attraction they wield."

For an instant he hesitated.

"It's not the kind of attraction for which a man should marry, Tommy," he added. "I want you to realize that before you do anything. That's why I have spoken to you in advance."

He relighted his cigar in the silent library while a sudden sense of deceit came over Tommy—and, with it, a peculiar impression of a sudden rending of the conventional curtain of existence between himself and his father.

The first personal reference to sex that his father had made in thirty years; that was what it was. The first words, indicative of any fire that had ever raged within him; the first words about any women which any discussion had ever drawn from him; the first words that might lead any one to believe that he, too, might have known other Rivieras with other-day Maizies, other Rhinebeck gardens with long-vanished Dianes.

"You don't have to worry, Dad," he said abruptly. "There isn't any danger—although I appreciate your motive."

He gazed at his father for an instant.

"When I have something definite to say, I'll say it!"

"About some one else, you mean?"

"Maybe," said Tommy with a grin.

He followed his father out into the hall toward the drawing-room with a sudden realization of the fact that Maizie had found an ally in the house of the Dumbartons.

"The only thing is," the Stork remarked at midnight, "that Diane is as mad as a hatter at you. What the devil did you say to her?"

"Nothing," said Tommy, "compared to what she said to me."

He went to bed, aware—for the first time—of a distinct feeling of personal unworthiness in his relations with his father. . . .

IT WAS not until some time later, indeed, that he realized to the full the character of the emotions which were surging in Diane just then.

Always the woman who took and then threw aside—to that easy rôle had she been hitherto assigned. Until that moment in the garden it had never occurred to her that there could be any doubt of her power. She had considered herself infinitely desirable, from her slim ankles to her dark hair. To be allowed to kiss her was the concession of a beautiful princess to an adoring subject.

She had liked Tommy, of course. There had been a glamour about him to her eyes—a glamour that was very real. He was a sculptor and an artist. He was six feet, with blue eyes and adorable brown hair. And behind him crowded all the attractive phantoms of Latin Quarter life—everything that was opposed to Rhinebeck and Miss Winter and the teachings of the Garnett School for Young Ladies.

To capture a man was the object of life, anyway. She had learned that before she had even finished with those summer camps for young girls to which she had gone at twelve because her mother had not considered her sufficiently interesting yet to be her daily companion. She had learned it more subtly and in detail—and from a rather different angle!—at that boarding-school off Fifth Avenue, where liquor and cigarettes had been the menu and men the conversation in those midnight, forbidden parties which her little group had had in their rooms.

A man—or, better, men! That was the aim of existence!

After that night at Rhinebeck she had definitely determined to annex Tommy and had discarded "Baby" and bent all her energies to the task, in the studio, at the theater, at her Aunt Jocelyn's.

She had had only a very dim conception of all that complicated system of ideas which lay in Tommy and showed such confused indications of its existence. The only thing she had been able to see at all clearly was that one had to call it love before he was genuinely attracted. And she had done that that night at her Aunt Jocelyn's—with excellent results.

As she stood in her room that next afternoon, a kind of passionate fury possessed her—a fury that drove her out into the upper passage, across the landing, down the stairs, to wherever Stork MacDowell might be.

She found him, dressed for a horseback ride, trying on gloves in the broad hallway beneath a print of General Washington and his family.

"I was hoping some one would go riding this afternoon!" she cried. "Wait for me, will you?"

And she ran back up the stairs, donned her riding habit hastily, and joined him in the graveled drive where he waited with the horses.

"It may rain," she said, with a nod at the gray November clouds which had replaced the summer's last gesture. "But I don't care, if you don't. I'd like the long hill path to the 'Nest'—the views are gorgeous."

"All right," he agreed, "though I didn't know you were a nature lover—"

"I'm not," she said instantly. "But I love a—storm!"

"So do I," agreed the Stork.

THEY broke into a little preliminary gallop that brought them to the first little rise of the hill curve where the horizon of sweeping clouds, filled with rain and yet touched here and there still with sunlight, seemed to bend gloomily over the stretching landscape.

"It's going to be a dandy!" she exclaimed. Her cheeks were vivid again.

"We'll just about make the Nest, I think, if we canter right along. It won't last over an hour." The Stork was prophesying.

"Don't thunder and lightning seem odd—and out of place!—in November?"

"I like 'em!" said the painter.

They dashed up the long hill road, through the thick woods, past the signs "State Reservoir" upon the trees, past the wind-ruffled ponds and out upon the high pasture wood road that led to the winding lane to the Nest, gaining its shelter just as the first drops of rain blew gustily through the clumps of alders and birches that clung to the hilltop behind it.

"I suppose there's an explanation," the Stork remarked as they leaned back against the logs in the little open camp which John Dumbarton had built for his children, and the juniper bushes and gray rocks of the open hill before them turned dark with rain.

"What of?" she asked.

"This sudden desire for my society," he replied satirically.

"You might be interesting," she pointed out.

"More so than Tommy, I suppose," he agreed.

She looked at him with open suspicion. "Tommy makes me sick," she said.

"I thought so," he remarked.

"Why, I don't care!" she exclaimed scornfully.

"I wouldn't," he agreed.

Silence fell between them while the rain struck at their feet, sputtering in occasionally on the chips, on the ground.

"Where do you come from?" she asked with sudden interest.

"Minneapolis."

"Oh, the West!"

"Nursed by a she-bear!" he admitted.

"That sounds vulgar enough," she remarked, a tiny grin on her face.

"Every real he-man is," the Stork retorted.

"You admit it!"

"I choose my company," he pointed out.

A SLIGHT flush came into Diane's cheeks.

"I suppose I should resent that," she said after a pause.

"The world is full of beautiful women," he retorted meaningly.

"As—attractive as I am?"

She stretched out her ankles and examined her riding boots, with eyes that held odd invitation.

"I don't know you," he pointed out; "though," he added, "I imagine we might understand each other."

"What do you mean?" she inquired.

She did not look at him. She stared out at the driving rain, at the filmy clouds of vapor that drifted through the cedars by the rocks, at the drops of water that hung glistening on every bush.

"I mean," he said, "that I abhor a prude."

He put his arm around her and held her tightly, gazing at her.

"Insulted?" he inquired.

For an instant she quivered—and then she relaxed.

"Bored," she replied. She did not take her eyes from the rain.

"Not for long!" he exclaimed.

He threw her backward suddenly, in a grip of steel, until her head was on the ground. Then he kissed her.

"Let me up!" she said angrily.

"I won't."

"You will!"

She threw herself upon her side, abruptly, wrenched her arms from his grasp and essayed to stand up.

"Oh, no, not so easy!" he cried.

He grasped her about the waist, seeking to break down the barrier she made with her elbows and hands pushed tightly against his breast.

"Stop!" she cried.

"Not now!"

"You horrid brute!"

SHE tore herself from him of a sudden, pulling herself backward and sidewise, eluding his grasp—and ran like a rabbit for the open woods beyond the pelting rain. But he caught her before she had gone twenty yards, gripped her like a child and slung her in his arms, kicking, and carried her back to the camp while she beat and tore at his coat, his collar, his tousled, flaxen hair.

"You beast! Beast! Beast!" Diane screamed.

"Nonsense!" he said.

He dumped her—fairly gently—upon the ground and rose, straightening his cuffs, brushing his sleeves, rearranging his necktie.

"Wasn't that better than dullness?" inquired the Stork, with a sudden, astonishing grin.

"Why—" she said.

She sat nearly a full minute, her hair a mass of loose black curls, her habit twisted about her, while she stared angrily up at him.

"It isn't funny," she said at last, a glint of hate in her eyes. "You can't treat me like that. I'll tell Tommy. He'll kill you!"

In the next instalment of "March Winds" trouble lies in wait for Tommy—a full measure, running over—not only with Stork but with Maizie and his father—in February EVERYBODY'S, on sale January 15.

Reconstruction

Beauty or Ugliness—What Matter in a Man? Why, It Sometimes Seems to Be All the Matter in the World!

By Stephen M. Walmsley

THE worship of physical perfection, so widely credited to the ancient Greeks, did not disappear when that remarkable nation passed out of its period of world supremacy. The cult still lives. The priests and priestesses whom we call artists practise their rites on marble and canvas. The lay brethren give homage with their eyes and voices. Some profess their faith openly, others worship unconsciously. Most of us, who have it not, worship perfection in others. Some of us who have it, worship it in ourselves.

Carleton Fredericks was one of the latter.

Ordinarily, it is an unkind thing to say that a man is beautiful. It conjures up unpleasant deductions and it is adding insult to injury to say that he worships his own beauty. But after all, men, as well as women, are beautiful and the method of worship, not the object, is what often makes it objectionable.

Carleton Fredericks was beautiful—of limb and torso and features—and he did worship his own beauty. He worshiped it because he was at heart an artist, though he never touched brush or chisel, and because his artist's eyes saw his own beauty with the same appreciative, critical gaze with which they saw beauty and ugliness elsewhere. Nor should his worship be confused with personal conceit. It was something very different. He never ceased to be thankful for this beauty which had been given him, but he took no credit for it. He did not even feel that he was charged with guarding it. It was something that couldn't be other than it was—something fixed, unchangeable, like the completed canvas of a master. And since he did not guard it, he came unscathed through a hundred contests while his teammates footballed and boxed and wrestled their several ways toward broken noses and battered ears.

The Beast, they called him, and he was proud of his nickname. Its very impropriety made it a compliment of the highest order. Had they called him Beauty, there would have been a sting to it; for he was beautiful. Had he been a beast, there would have been a sting to it; but he wasn't. His mind was as clean and healthy as his body. His feet were free from the muck of the paths into which his beauty might easily have led him.

And then, almost in a moment it seemed, this beauty, this fixed, unchangeable thing that had been a part of him, was gone.

Carleton Fredericks came back from the war with a stiffened ankle and a misshapen foot that thrust itself out, almost at right angles to his leg, and a face that seemed to have been fashioned from the mismated joining of two cruelly different faces. One half was pure classical, firm and glowing and alive. The other was loose and flabby. It sagged until it drew the lower eyelid down with it. It hung in an ugly fold below the line of the jawbone.

The same bursting shell had done it all. A huge fragment had crashed into his ankle with a stunning, sickening blow. A tiny, knife-edged splinter had cut the nerve in his cheek with all the precision of a surgeon's scalpel.

At first the wounded ankle was his only concern. He realized a numbness in his cheek. It reminded him of an anesthetic which a dentist had given him and which had spread slowly for an hour or more after the need for it had passed. A clumsy, thickened feeling made his lips difficult of movement. But he thought that this numbness, like the anesthetic, would go. He did not realize, lying there in his bed, that the muscles of his face, on the wounded side, were slackening and softening.

But the realization could not be forever delayed. He began to watch the eyes of the doctors and nurses as they examined his cheek. He began to ask them guarded questions, afraid to demand the whole truth. And what he learned gripped his heart like a closed fist. His hand wandered again and again to his face, his fingers seeking to read what was written there as a blinded man deciphers the raised characters of a book. He watched the nurses furtively as they passed bearing hand mirrors, specially provided for the benefit of some patient who was struggling with a budding mustache. He longed to ask for a moment's glance at himself but panic forced back the request.

THERE came a day when he need no longer stay in bed. They brought him crutches and bade him use them. For fifteen minutes, with frequent periods of rest, he hobbled up and down the long ward amid the encouraging plaudits of his fellow patients. The surgeon and the nurse watched him until they were satisfied of his strength, and then went about their duties. Fredericks waited until they were gone and then slowly and without apparent purpose, worked his way toward the little wash room at the end of the ward.

There was a mirror there. He approached the room cautiously but tried not to appear cautious—a thief working unfamiliar territory, absorbed, alert, but wishing to appear casual and uninterested. Twice he reached the door and turned back because the room was occupied, ashamed to admit his curiosity about himself.

But at last the place was empty. He hobbled in and stood before the little square of glass that hung by the window. For a long moment he stared breathlessly at the unfamiliar image that confronted him. Then he turned. Carefully and slowly he left the wash room. Carefully and slowly he worked his way down the long ward between the rows of white-enameled cots. Carefully and slowly he laid aside his crutches and climbed into bed. He drew the coverings close about his shoulders and closed his eyes, his injured cheek buried in the pillows.

The men in the adjoining beds thought him asleep and lowered their voices with the instinctive sympathy of men who suffer together. The nurse thought him asleep when she passed his bed, an hour later. The surgeon thought him asleep when he made his rounds after the supper hour. But he was not asleep. Never had he been more vitally, cruelly awake. His thoughts refused to wander. His mind would not relax. He was staring through his closed lids at the face in the little square of glass that hung in the wash room. The image was burning itself into his brain.

Night came and with it welcome darkness when the lights had been extinguished. He turned on his back and stared wide-eyed at the dim ceiling above him.

During that awful night and the more awful dawn which followed, Carleton Fredericks lay and watched the things that are worth while in life parade before him; march past and away; disappear: comradeship and equality with his fellow beings; a place in the rushing current that is life; love. And he saw, marching forward to take their places, pitiful toleration, sympathy, ridiculing cruelty. He saw the men he had known slapping him on the back, greeting him with strained hilarity and then falling silent, hurrying away on trumped-up excuses. He saw women striving to make their words sound natural while their eyes cried out in pity.

And he had no courage to face it all. The hospital which had seemed a prison became a haven. He dreaded the day when he should have to leave its protecting walls. Inside, he was safe from prying eyes. He was among those whom physical deformity had ceased to shock or even surprise. He was where he belonged.

So the strength which was flowing into his wounded foot began to ebb. Weeks lengthened into months before the tide turned again. Fredericks did not care. The shattered foot which had seemed such a tragedy, had ceased to matter. He might have gone out into the world wearing that deformity as other men wear a bit of brilliant-colored ribbon on their breasts. But this other!

But the tide turned at last. His foot was well—as well as it ever would be. There was no excuse for his staying longer in the hospital. He began to think of going home—home to the old place on the other side of the broad Potomac from the hospital where he had been so long; home to the big brick house with the white pillars and the dogwoods in front of it and the long stables behind it; home to old William and his wife Sally and the gardener and the stable boys. For there was no one else. He was glad there was not. He thought of his mother, dead since his childhood. She had been the toast of a half-dozen counties, as proud of her own beauty as she was of her son's. He thought of his father, who had died while he was in France. He remembered him as he had seen him last, on the dock at Newport News, watching the big troopship work its way outward: straight, handsome, immaculate, a man to whom the least unconventionality of speech or dress or appearance was a real pain. A spot on his waistcoat or shirt front could ruin an evening. Suppose he had lived to see this!

The day came for Fredericks's departure. He had written to the old family lawyer at the little county seat, telling him of his coming. He had said good-by to his fellow patients and to the nurses and doctors. He had signed all the necessary papers and had been given the necessary examinations. He had received his discharge.

The automobile, hired for the long drive home, was waiting. He limped slowly out of the door and down the steps. The crippled foot was hard to handle. He stumbled a little as he tried to enter the car—and a woman laughed. It was just the little silvery, unconscious laugh of a woman who stood on the steps talking to one of the patients. She was not laughing at Fredericks: she had not seen him come out; she did not know that any one was trying to step into an automobile, there at the bottom of the steps. But at the sound of the laugh Fredericks flinched as from a knife point. Panic seized him. He wanted to turn and rush back inside the sheltering walls which he had just left. His knuckles showed white where he gripped the side of the car.

After a moment he pulled himself inside and sank into the upholstered seat. He dared not turn his head lest he see who had laughed.

The drive was long, endlessly long. The Virginia roads were far from good and Fredericks was not so strong as he had thought himself, back in the hospital. The jolting automobile became a torture to his weary body. The country in its autumn garb did not thrill him as it had, just a few years before. The familiar landmarks, when at last they began to appear, hardly drew his attention.

AT LAST the automobile turned in at the gate and rolled up the long driveway. He was home at last—and what a homecoming! William and Sally and the others were gathered to meet him. He could see their flashing teeth as they peered expectantly toward the approaching car. Panic seized him again. Why hadn't he written to the old lawyer of what had happened? He had told him of his foot but when he would have written of his face, his fingers refused to form the words. He was taking his old friends—servants, but friends since childhood nevertheless—unawares.

He clambered from the automobile, his eyes darting from one to another of the black faces. He saw the smiles change, on the instant, to expressions of amazed incredulity. He saw old William's arms and hands jerk like a marionette's as he bowed and scraped, his eyes refusing to return to his master's face. He saw Sally turn and rush into the house, flinging her apron over her head. With hardly a word of greeting he passed across the veranda and through the high doorway.

Began for Carleton Fredericks a life such as he had pictured for himself, that first night in the hospital. As the news of his return spread over the countryside, his old friends began to arrive. The Montgomerys and the Churchills, the Devereaux and the Cantrels. Their cars came to a stop at the foot of the veranda steps or the stable boys walked their hunters back and forth on the driveway. Fredericks received them all quietly, defensively, his gaze seeking always the shock and the pity that they could not hide. Nor were their visits long. Another errand that must be performed—a horse that must not be allowed to chill and stiffen. They were gone almost before they had arrived. And Fredericks let them go. He had expected it all. And he returned none of their calls. Invitations to dances, dinners and hunt meets, he declined.

Life went on, aimless and boring. The servants, after the first few days, accepted his deformities but accepted also the cheerless pall which had settled on the household. Chattering groups dissolved at his approach. Whistling stable boys fell silent. The great house, which had been the scene of so much gaiety in the years gone by, grew somber as a cathedral. Fredericks tried the books which lined the library walls. But it was no use. He had never had literary tastes and he could not acquire them now. There was nothing that demanded his attention. An occasional call from his lawyer sufficed in his business affairs. The great plantation which had founded the family fortune, generations before, had dwindled until only a few acres remained; and the proceeds had gone into bonds and securities that required little attention.

Only his horses were left—Ranger, the priceless old hunter, wise in the lore of field and rider, and the two half-bred ponies, Midnight and Dawn. They did not mind a deformed foot, since it could still grasp a stirrup iron, nor did they flinch at the sight of a face, half of which sagged so heavily. Therefore Carleton Fredericks spent many hours in the saddle, on the soft dirt roads of the countryside or across the brown fields of close-cut stubble—but always alone. The sight of approaching riders or the voice of hounds sent him cantering up a side lane or back along the way he had come.

The winter passed and spring came, a spring that dawdled and hesitated and turned back until even the crocuses dared not show their faces. Fredericks, home late from a long ride, paused on the doorstep before entering. Darkness had settled down and a chill drizzle was falling. He scraped at the mud on his shoes and puttees —no boot could be drawn over that ankle— with the handle of his riding crop. It promised to be a night for bitter thoughts, soul-wrenching memories.

FROM a distance came the low purr of an automobile. Fredericks listened idly, wondering who it might be. The car came swiftly nearer until he could see the glow of its headlights. A hundred yards away the engine began to sputter and miss, then died altogether and the car rolled to a halt, directly in front of the gate. Fredericks heard faint voices. He waited ten minutes and then walked down the driveway, picking his way carefully in the darkness, the sound of his footsteps deadened in the soft clay. A dozen yards from the gate the sound of a girl's voice brought him to a halt. He could see her figure, dimly, standing by the car.

"If this isn't the damnedest luck!"

"Winifred! Please!" came a woman's protesting voice from inside the car.

"Well, *isn't* it, mother?" continued the girl. "It's past dinner time now and I'm starved. Besides, Betsy wrote me to be *sure* and get there for dinner tonight. They're going to start the week off with a *real* party and they can still give *real* ones down here. We might as well not have come at all."

"It might be a pleasing novelty, Winifred, to exercise a little self-control. Please remember that I'm not enjoying this any more than you are."

For a moment Fredericks was grasped by a desire to go back, to slip away unseen. He pictured the owner of the younger voice as though she stood in a glare of light. Bobbed hair, sport clothes, petulant, scarlet lips, quick, worldly-wise eyes that could mock cruelly at an unfortunate like himself.

But he didn't turn back. After all, that was no reason for leaving them stranded by the roadside. He stepped forward slowly, more than ever aware of his limp.

"I wonder if I can help you. I am Mr. Fredericks—Carleton Fredericks—and I live just inside here."

The girl turned, startled. "Gee! You scared me! But I'm glad to see you. We're in a devil of a fix. We were to be at the Devereaux' for dinner and now it looks as if we'd never get there."

"I'm sorry," replied Fredericks. "It's five or six miles over to the Devereaux place. I don't keep a car or I'd run you over, but if you'll come in I can telephone and have them send after you. Then we can get some one out from the village to help with your car."

"Thank you, Mr. Fredericks," came the voice from the car. "We shall be more than pleased to accept your offer. I am Mrs. Haverford and this is my daughter Winifred. We were driving down from Washington."

Fredericks led the way up the drive and waited outside the door to let his guests pass in before him. Inside, he paused to lay his cap and crop on a high shelf in the hallway. Winifred turned, as he stood, his face in profile, the uninjured cheek turned toward her. His head was thrown back and the soft collar of his riding shirt left his throat bare. He might have been Mercury, poised for flight.

An unconscious cry of amazement at the man's beauty slipped from the girl's lips. Fredericks heard it. Tribute, conscious or unconscious, from women was no new experience. It had always pleased him, although he had taken it as a matter of course; but now it cut him to the quick. His muscles tightened; then he lowered his arms and deliberately turned to face the girl, his eyes searching hers.

It was a cruel thing to do, an unpardonable thing. It swept away in an instant all her super-sophistication of nineteen years and left her a stuttering, embarrassed child. Her hand flew to her mother's arm—so much he seemed to be a bogy man in the shadowy corner of the nursery.

It was a bad half-hour before the Devereaux car swung up the driveway. Mrs. Haverford's quiet poise alone made it bearable. Winifred did not speak a dozen words but Fredericks could feel her eyes upon him—could feel them only, for she never met his glance.

As they said good-by at the top of the veranda steps, Winifred thrust out a hand that made a show of bravery but trembled nevertheless.

"We'll be at the Devereaux' for a week or more. I—I wish you'd come and see us. We're very much obliged to you." Her voice was low and there was a little catch in it.

"Thank you," replied Carleton. "But I don't get out very much."

"I'm sorry. Good night!" She was gone.

Fredericks returned to a belated dinner, eaten alone in the big dining-room, with its long table and mahogany sideboards, heavy with the generations' old silver. But his food did not interest him. He was thinking of Winifred. The picture of the girl standing by the car had changed. It was still the girl with the bobbed hair, sport clothes and scarlet lips; but the eyes were those of a frightened child—a child whose glance was downcast because she could not bear to see another suffer. It was a haunting picture.

ON THE afternoon of the second day, Fredericks, riding alone, saw a girl, mounted on a long-legged thoroughbred, swing around a distant turn in the road and approach at a gallop. His first impulse was to avoid her but that could not well be done, so he drew his horse to the side of the road to let her pass and watched her come. Her riding annoyed him, as poor horsemanship always did. Her body was hunched forward, her elbows flapped and her hands were heavy on the bit. But with it all there was a certain lithe rhythm of her body that excused her lack of finish. She was riding because she loved it, not because it was the thing to do.

After a moment Fredericks realized that it was Winifred—and she was not going to pass. She pulled up beside him, breathless, her face flushed.

"Hello!" she gasped. "I was afraid I was going to miss you. They told me this was one of your regular routes but I began to think you had taken another. May I ride with you?"

"Of course," replied Fredericks. "I shall be delighted." But he hardly knew what he said. He was not thinking of his words. He was wondering that the girl's eyes had looked straight into his without flinching; that her greeting had carried no hint of embarrassment. Could she be the same girl who two days before had sat in his house for a long half-hour and refused to meet his gaze once?

All through the afternoon they rode together. Winifred carried the conversation forward, a little breathlessly at times as though she were afraid it would die, but with an ease that amazed her companion. The doings at the Devereaux house party; the people she had met and what she thought of them; Washington and her own friends—and Fredericks found himself smiling back at her unconsciously and laughing at her descriptions as he had not laughed for months—all those months since the afternoon when he had stood before the little mirror in the hospital wash room.

He rode with her almost to the Devereaux gateway but when she urged him to come in he only shook his head and turned his horse homeward, a little abruptly, he thought afterward. When he was alone again all the old hopelessness returned. What had the afternoon meant, after all? A clever, kind-hearted girl had pitied him; by schooling herself since the hours of their first meeting she hid her feelings behind laughing eyes—repaying, probably, the little debt she owed for the assistance he had rendered; thankful, already, that it was over and that she had done so well.

On the following day Fredericks halted his horse at the crossroads. One way led over the accustomed route that he had followed the day before, the other lay over an unfrequented road. He chose the latter.

The week drew to a close, and each day he shunned the road where Winifred had found him or changed the hours of his ride. And each day the Devereaux house party drew nearer to a close. Fredericks checked the days off in his mind, impatient with himself for doing so. The incident was closed. There could be no reopening. Even dreams must not be tolerated.

THE end of the week arrived. Laggard spring had quickened its pace. The air was soft and fragrant with budding life. Fredericks sat on the veranda smoking an after-dinner cigarette, and listening to the awakening of the spring night. Sounds came clearly from afar: the voices of negroes singing; a horse's hoofs on the road; and then the distant purr of a motor that rose and fell, that seemed to come no nearer but did not die away. But suddenly it was near at hand, the beams from the headlight swung sharply and flashed up the driveway. Fredericks rose to his feet, his heart thumping.

It was one of the Devereaux roadsters, long and low and racy. When it stopped a girl slid out from beneath the steering-wheel and stood in the glow from the open door. It was Winifred, clad in a corn-colored gown which matched her short, corn-colored curls. A soft cloak fell away from her bare shoulders. Fredericks limped to the top of the steps to greet her but stood silent, not trusting his voice.

"May I come up?" she asked.

Fredericks nodded and took the hand which she stretched out in greeting.

"Let's sit here," the girl continued, turning toward the long porch bench. "It's so wonderful out-of-doors tonight."

Fredericks followed her.

The girl seated herself and looked out into the darkness for a moment before speaking.

"You haven't even been polite," she said at last. "Every day I've looked for you on the only road that I knew. Was that a nice way to treat a stranger who could not find her way about?"

"I thought it was best," was all Fredericks could reply.

"What do you mean by that?" asked the girl quickly. She did not wait for a reply. "But why do I ask that? I know what you mean. I know all about you. I've asked and they have told me—your friends whom you have deserted—the Devereaux, the Churchills, the Montgomerys, all of them. But why have you let this—this misfortune make such a difference?"

Fredericks sat silent for a moment and then said slowly, forming each word carefully in his tightened throat, "Did you ever have the dream—that so many people—have—that you are standing—naked—in a busy street? that every one—is staring—at you—and you have no place—to hide?"

"A dream!" interrupted the girl breathlessly. "Yes, that's it! A dream from which you won't let yourself awaken. A horrid, cowardly dream! And because of it you are shutting yourself away from your friends, proclaiming to everybody that you have no faith in them. Don't you suppose they feel it? Don't you suppose it hurts them?"

"But I saw it—in their eyes. And I couldn't bear it!" interrupted Fredericks.

"Yes, you saw it in their eyes—pity. Don't you expect any one to have human feelings? Are we all to wear masks? And you gave them no second chance. You would have given me no second chance; I had to make one for myself. Do you think your friends loved you for your—your beauty? Yes, you were beautiful. Wasn't there anything left after that was gone? What do I—they—we care for your beauty? Oh, it isn't fair! It isn't brave! That's why I ran away tonight and came over here. I couldn't find you any other way and I had to tell you before I went—had to try and make you see." Her hands were beating the seat beside her. "Begin now! Don't wait! Come back with me to the Devereaux' tonight. Every one you know is there. It's the farewell party. Give them another chance. Oh, do come! Do come!"

Fredericks rose to his feet unsteadily. He took the girl's hand and led her across the veranda and through the doorway to the brilliantly lighted hall. Then he released her hand and faced her.

"It was easy to say—what you did—out there—in the darkness. Could you say it now?"

The girl's eyes looked steadily into his. Her lips were parted and her breath raced. She half raised her hands, gropingly.

"Yes! Yes!" she repeated. "I can say it now."

Carleton Fredericks looked deep into her eyes, searching, searching.

"Very well," he said at last. "Then I'll come."

THE house was ablaze with lights, and the veranda and lawn were overrun with laughing, talking people. Fredericks climbed out of the car, a little stiffly, and walked beside Winifred up the broad steps and through the open doorway. The bright light threatened him like a wall of fire but he plunged in, his eyes darting toward the faces about him. But he did not find what he was seeking.

"Hello, Fredericks!"

"Boy, howdy!"

"Glad to see you aboard!"

"So good to see you again, Carleton!"

Each of his friends greeted him in his or her own way, cordially but casually. There was nothing unusual in his being there. He might have been with them all the night before and the night before that.

He stood at the entrance to the long ballroom, watching the dancers swing by. Most of them were his friends but there was an occasional stranger, a guest at the house party or at a near-by place. Suddenly a huge figure swung out of the maze and caught Fredericks's eye. It was Hub Standish, one-time center on Fredericks's own team during his days at a northern college. They had not met since their school days.

At the sight of Fredericks, the big man released the girl with whom he was dancing as if she had been a cactus plant. He swung one long arm over his head.

"It's the Beast!" he roared.

For a moment there was a silence, a tenseness which only the big man failed to sense. For a moment Fredericks's body changed to stone—but only for a moment, for as he looked into Hub's eyes he saw that his old friend was looking, not at a maimed foot or disfigured face, but at the Carleton Fredericks he had known those years ago. The blood rushed back into Fredericks's body with a glow of warmth, and the handclasp that he returned asked no odds of the one he received.

The big man's arm was around his shoulders. "They told me the boche nicked you, but we should worry. Who won the war, anyway? Me, I was a marine. What were you?" He turned and waved his arm toward those around them. "Beat it, you first families of Virginia! My buddy and I are going to fight the war over again. Don't disturb us!" With his arm still about Fredericks's shoulder, he led him to a seat.

It was a new Carleton Fredericks who tore himself away from reminiscence a half-hour later; new because his horrid dream about himself had faded, and because he had suddenly realized that Winifred had been watching him as he talked, her eyes glistening, her cheeks flushed.

He rose and walked toward her. As he skirted the dancers, some one jostled him and his lame foot gave way so that he staggered clumsily for an instant. It was Jeff Devereaux, good-natured, overgrown Jeff who would not willingly hurt a fly, but Fredericks caught the glance which Winifred darted at the offender. It was venomous.

SO IT was she, not he, who was suffering. She had slipped into the pit from which he had so recently escaped. It made Fredericks pause. He should have known what the result would be. He should never have let her bring him. She felt responsible for him. He should have done the thing himself. But when he looked again she was watching him and the tenderness in her glance made him forget the other. He would see to it that she did not suffer, show her that her experiment had been a success, that he had come back into his own. He gave her a cheery wave of his hand and plunged into the midst of the party determined to show her that she need have no concern about him.

He even tried to dance with broad-shouldered Ailsa Churchill, who was as tall as he and held him to the work as she might have held a green hunter to a post and rail jump.

"All you want is a little schooling, Carl," she laughed, when the music stopped; "and in no time at all you'll be up with the field."

Fredericks didn't tell her that his lame foot was torturing him. He only laughed back and thanked her.

At last the party was breaking up and as Fredericks stood, a little uncertain of what was expected of him, Winifred came to his side and slipped her hand under his arm.

"I'll drive you home. I brought you, you know."

Fredericks could not find it in his heart to protest. She would be leaving tomorrow and the realization was coming home to him that the time which remained was very, very short. His partner in this venture which had hauled him from the backwaters and thrust him out into the current again was departing—leaving him to carry on alone. He followed her to the roadster and climbed in beside her.

For a mile or two they drove in silence, the powerful car loitering like an ambling race horse. The night was all but gone and the smell of the dawn was in the air. Sleepy birds twittered and the cattle in the fields by the roadside were beginning to stir.

At last Winifred spoke, her gaze on the road ahead. "Was I right?"

"More so than you knew," replied Fredericks. "It was wonderful. I don't know how to tell you what I feel. I can only say that I owe you more than I can ever repay; that it has changed my whole life."

"Can't you say just a little more than that? I think I should like to hear it."

Something rose in Fredericks's throat and choked him. He sat for a moment trying to form his words.

"Yes," he said slowly when at last he trusted his voice, "I can say more than that, though I think it better left unsaid. I can say that you have come into my life in a way that I hoped—yes, hoped—that no woman would. You have made me love you as though—as though—I were some one who might be loved. Your going away is almost more than I can bear."

"But suppose I don't go away! Suppose I stay with you—always." Winifred's voice was almost inaudible above the purr of the motor.

Fredericks shook his head. He seemed to be talking to himself rather than to the girl beside him.

"NO, YOU'RE not going to stay. I shan't let you. I wouldn't ask it, and much less permit it. You would be staying for only one reason—pity. And I don't want pity. You don't realize what it would mean to be bound to some one who must be looked after, as you have looked after me tonight, looked after and agonized over. Tonight we were among friends; yet I saw you look at Jeff Devereaux when he jostled me and I know what it meant. Suppose we had been among strangers. How would you have felt? And we must be among strangers sometimes. We can't stay here always, shut away from the world. You couldn't stand it. It's not what you are accustomed to. You'd find yourself wishing for the old life. You couldn't help it. It would be cruelty, selfish cruelty.

"No, go back to your friends. You have already given me a priceless thing. It is enough."

Winifred beat with her hands on the steering-wheel and her words came tumbling out. "Oh, Carleton! Let's not argue about whether it's pity or—or love. What difference does it make? I've found what I want. I don't know just why. Sometimes I wonder at it myself. But I've found it. I want to be with you. I want to watch you finish what you began tonight. Maybe it's because things have always been so easy for me, because I have never had to struggle for anything. And you have a struggle. There are going to be times when you will find yourself slipping back, when you will have to fight to keep what you have gained. And I want to struggle with you. Maybe it's that and maybe it's because you need me—and every woman wants to be needed.

"And why do you speak of being shut away from the world, here? Didn't your father and your mother and their fathers and mothers live here? Did they feel shut away? Do the Devereaux and all the others feel shut away? What would we—you and I—need that we haven't here?

"Oh, I know you think that I'm a flapper and must have excitement and change and all the things that flappers are supposed to need. Maybe I am a flapper and maybe I have wanted those things. But not now. I just want you—just want to be with you." Her voice broke a little. "And, Carleton, don't make me—make me beg this way. It isn't fair. You admitted that I was right about the other—about your coming to the Devereaux'. Why won't you admit that I am right about this?"

And because the dawn that was creeping silently over the eastern sky and driving the black night before it was not only the birth of a new day for an awakening world but was also the birth of a new life for Carleton Fredericks, a life that held hope and belief in himself, he forgot his doubts and his fears and his horrid dream and admitted, for the second time, that Winifred was right.

Coming in February

Besides the complete novel, "The Goat Without Horns," by Beale Davis (see announcement on page 111) there will be—

Seven Short Stories

The Subconscious Witness — By Stoddard Goodhue
In the limbo of forgotten things Dr. Goodrich uncovers the answer to a perplexing question

Neither Innocent nor a Bystander — By Lucian Cary
Anita encounters surprising consequences from sympathizing with a jilted lover

Lulu—She Steals the Show — By Gayne Dexter
Milton Glaze, moving-picture promoter, in another mirthful episode

The Flagellant of Farthing Rock — By J. H. Greene
A story of a stern sea-washed island and a fanatical patriarch who metes out justice

Conquerors of the City — By Charles Divine
Jimmy Andrews discovers that success is not always measured by appearances

The Mating of Pompalone — By T. S. Stribling
When the impetuous West meets the complacent East something is bound to happen

Major of Lamontai — By Charles Alexander
The conflict between duty and happiness furnishes a dramatic situation in this story of a man and his dog

And Three Serials

"The Phantom Caravan," by Howard Vincent O'Brien, "March Winds," by Francis R. Bellamy, and "The Doctor Disagrees," by Robert A. Simon

February *EVERYBODY'S* Out January 15

The Linoleum Trail

When a Sense of Innocence, with Undiluted Courage and a Quick Wit, Almost Made a Perfect Case of Suicide

By Stoddard Goodhue

IN THE course of his long experience as a criminologist, Dr. Daniel Goodrich has acquired a fund of interesting anecdotes covering almost every aspect of life. But about the only way to get him to relate any of them is to suggest some debatable principle of human conduct. Then he may respond with an illustrative case—if he chances to be in the right mood.

We were sitting in his office the other day, gossiping, when some question about tests for "nerve" came up. I forget just what the point was—something suggested by a newspaper yarn, I think. Anyway, the medical examiner came back, after a moment's meditation, with this comment:

"I'm inclined to think the nerviest person I ever saw was a young woman named Costigan."

"Sounds like a name that might belong to a nervy person," I commented, just to set the ball rolling. "But what did she do to prove it?"

The physician was silent so long that I began to think he had not heard my question, or chose to ignore it. He sat resting his chin on his left hand in characteristic fashion, his eyes fixed on nothing in particular, apparently. But finally he raised his head a little, and his air was that of one coming out of a profound reverie, as he said:

"Courage is determined not so much by what you do as how you do it. For the most part, Miss Costigan did nothing at all. That is to say, she sat tight in an office all night long with the body of a man who had been shot. It was the inaction that tested her. She was all alone there, and the building was deserted, except for the night watchman."

"Couldn't she telephone for a policeman?"

"She could, but she had reasons of her own for not wanting to." The doctor's eyes were twinkling. "Instead of telephoning, she kept perfectly still. Of course I know only inferentially as to what the condition of her nerves may have been during the night. From what I saw of her afterward, however, I am inclined to believe her story, to the effect that she slept part of the time. There was a kind of settee in the office and she curled up on that and slept—more or less."

"And where was the dead man in the meantime?"

"He was lying on his back over beside his desk, where he had tumbled when the bullet went through him." An expressive gesture and a fitting grimace accompanied the words. The narrator scowled a little and looked fixedly at the floor, as if he saw the man lying before him, as he added: "We found him there next morning, still clutching the revolver in his left hand."

EVERY one who has heard Dr. Goodrich tell a story will agree that there is as much interest in watching his face as in listening. To reproduce one of his stories with justice would require the coöperation of a moving-picture apparatus. The physician is a man of many moods, and each mood is reflected in his face, and symbolized, if the phrase be permitted, in his entire body.

Whereas he is capable of sitting hours together, scarcely moving a muscle—except as he reflectively strokes his chin or pulls at an eyebrow in curious fashion—when he is working out some weighty problem; when he is in a mood for talking, the brain centers for physical action seem to be stimulated along with the speech center, and he becomes the apotheosis of activity. At one moment he is sprawled out in his chair, relaxed, motionless; the next, he is on his feet, with arms extended, pantomiming the episode he is describing, with verisimilitude that would do credit to a professional actor.

His face, meantime, is equally expressive. In repose it is a ruggedly hewn countenance, modeled along large lines, in keeping with the massive head. The shock of iron-gray hair gives a leonine suggestion; and the impressive forehead, the overhanging brows, the deep-set steel-gray eyes that slumber or flash or sparkle, the strongly aquiline nose, and the firm mouth with its long upper lip—all these give a truly magisterial aspect to the ensemble.

But the aspect of authority—of power—is not more pronounced than the aspect of kindliness. The wrinkles that radiate from the corners of those shrewdly evaluating eyes tell that the countenance seeming so gravely dignified in repose has been habituated to laughter. The strong, slightly protruding chin and tightly drawn lips tell volumes for the force of character—firmness of will, stubbornness, if you please—of their owner; but the lines that curve about the mouth and make little creases at the sides of the chin, even in repose, were assuredly sculped not otherwise than by much smiling.

Such a face is built up only as the outward manifestation of a mind at once comprehensive and profound; sympathetic and shrewd; sanely world-evaluating and self-evaluating. No man with such a face ever erred greatly in self-estimate. And no man who correctly estimates himself ever fails of a ready sense of humor, a kindly tolerance toward the frailties of others; a spirit of broadly receptive optimism far removed from bigoted intolerance on one hand and maudlin sentimentality on the other.

Such an estimate was in my mind as I now saw the physician begin to arouse. I knew that he was visualizing his subject. But I knew also that a little prompting might be necessary before I could make sure of getting the story that was in his mind. I endeavored to show interest, not eagerness, as I questioned.

"The man had shot himself, then? And the girl was there to see it?"

A quizzical smile played about the physician's mouth. "The girl was there and saw what happened; there is no doubt about that. Whether she saw the man shoot himself is another question." He paused, to let me get the full force of the distinction. Then: "Not that there is any doubt about his being shot. The bullet went through his heart, and he was killed instantly. There were powder marks on his coat, too, as if the revolver had been held against his side. And the direction of the bullet was what it would naturally be if the man had been holding the revolver."

The physician crooked his wrist and held his left index finger to his side. I began to feel that I should get the story.

"NEVERTHELESS, you speak as if there was some doubt about that particular point," I ventured. "Did you find that he had not held the revolver?"

"There was no question raised about that at first. And after the matter was all cleared up—in so far as it ever was cleared up—I was still inclined to believe that he did hold the revolver, and hold it in his left hand, at the time when it was discharged. Nevertheless, he did not kill himself. At least he did not do the thing intentionally."

I did not fail to note the emphasis on the word "intentionally." So I prompted: "And that, I suppose, is where Miss Costigan figures. She had a hand in the killing, I take it?"

"Literally that. She was pointing the revolver at Hartley—that was the man's name—and threatening to shoot him if he did not keep away from her, when he reached out and grabbed at the revolver, intending of course to turn it aside or take it away from the girl, and the thing exploded, sending the bullet through his heart."

"Nice predicament for the girl. When did this occur?"

"Early in the evening. Probably about eight o'clock. It appears that Hartley had persuaded the girl—she was his stenographer, you know—to stay after hours that night, ostensibly to do some extra work; and then to go to dinner with him, and to a play or the movies or something afterward. But he seems to have had some ulterior plans that did not conform to her ideas, and when these were divulged, the episode of the revolver transpired."

The narrator was warming to his subject. But he was still sitting in his chair. Until I had him on his feet I should not feel sure of my story. So by way of further prompting, I asked: "How did she come to have a revolver?"

"She didn't have it, at first. It was in a drawer in Hartley's desk. She knew about it, and apparently got hold of it, and threatened to use it. He made a move that I suppose he would have described as 'calling her bluff'; and this might or might not have worked if the girl's finger hadn't accidentally pressed the trigger. I don't know, I am sure, whether she was bluffing or not. That isn't material to the story. The point is that he made a grab for the revolver, and in so doing—perhaps because she attempted to jerk her hand back—the trigger was pressed, with results noted."

Now the physician paused, as if the narrative were finished instead of just begun. But he had got slowly to his feet, and I knew that for a good symptom. I thought I might venture to bait him a little.

"It wasn't a nice predicament for the girl," I suggested. "But you say she took it coolly, and curled up on the settee, and went to sleep? That doesn't sound plausible."

Dr. Goodrich simulated an expression of surprise. He had begun to walk back and forth, and he made several turns before he paused in front of me and, rubbing his hands as if pleased with the trend things were taking, said placidly:

"I didn't say she took it coolly. In point of fact, I presume she was frantic at the time. Of course she must have been. But she realized that it would not be a good idea to make a row. At any rate, she presently came to that conclusion. It was after hours, and she had no very good reason for being there in the office. She was clever enough to realize that her story of the accidental character of the killing might not pass muster with a jury."

HE PAUSED a moment, and now he spoke with even greater animation. "Hartley was a man of high standing, and of impeccable reputation. The girl's reputation, as we learned afterward, was not quite unimpeachable. Probably she had that in mind. At any rate, she decided promptly that her best move did not lie in the direction of calling the authorities and stating her case."

We were getting on. Feeling my way a little, I adopted an argumentative tone and demanded: "But why did she not go home? You can always get out of an office building, can't you?"

"She could get out of the office itself readily enough, of course. She had only to open the door and walk out. But the elevators were not running after seven o'clock—for it was strictly an office building, you understand. And although she could walk down the stairs, she could not get through the street door without a key. She knew that the door was locked with a special key, for she had been at the office after hours a few times before. And she knew that the watchman was always in the hall, and that she could not get out without his assistance."

"In other words," I commented casually, "she could not get out of the building without being seen. So she decided it was better to remain in the office. But that was only postponing the evil day. Of course she would be seen in the morning, when people came to the office."

The physician's eyes were twinkling. "Not if her plans worked out," he asserted. "In point of fact they did work out. She was not seen when people came in the morning. That, really, is the point of my story." A humorous element of the situation evidently appealed to him.

"But I thought you said she remained in the office, and even went to sleep on the settee. Indeed, that is the special point you were making—illustrating the girl's nerve." I held to the argumentative tone, since it seemed to get results.

"Just so. But I did not say she remained there all night. In point of fact, she probably did remain on the settee for the greater part of the night." A reflective pause. "Perhaps until morning. But then she went to work to execute her plan, which by no means incorporated the idea of having herself found there, asleep or awake, when things began to function in the office building."

Another pause, during which the physician paced back and forth, his hands behind his back. Then he stood before me and gestured with the air of driving home an argument as he declared: "And her plans worked out so well that she was not found there; nor was there any evidence of her ever having been there, when the janitor came, at about seven o'clock in the morning, to clean up the office. The janitor had a key, of course, and he came in as usual at that hour—the door being of the ordinary office type, with a spring lock: the kind you can open by merely turning the handle from the inside, but requiring a key from the outside. The janitor came in, as I say, and started to clean up in the entrance-way, and then wandered into the main office, probably after a waste basket, and came on the body of poor Hartley lying there with the revolver in his hand."

"I KNOW the janitor in the Schuyler Building," I suggested, mainly to fill in another interval of silence. "His name is McCarthy, if memory serves me, and a quaint old character he is. I certainly would have liked to see him as he came on the body."

The physician smiled broadly. "So should I. His remarks would be worth recording. But unfortunately no one was there to hear them. I came on the scene, together with young Webster—the assistant district attorney, you know—about an hour later. McCarthy had left everything just as he found it, and a policeman or two had come to guard things and keep everybody out. In point of fact, nobody attempted to come in, for the janitor kept his own counsel, and word of the suicide had not as yet spread among the people in the building. By this time, as you will understand, the building was a regular beehive. Half a dozen elevators running full blast, and hundreds of people coming and going. But Hartley's office opens off a little side hall that no one has occasion to enter except in coming to that particular office. I may add that the caretaker had scrubbed this little hall early in the morning and the linoleum floor was particularly clean. There is significance in that fact, as will appear presently."

The medical examiner paused for a little time, and a curious half-quizzical smile lurked about his mouth. I knew that he was recalling some amusing thing, not obviously pertinent to the tragedy he was describing. But I knew also that it was best to let him take his own time about telling what was in his mind. So I assumed an air of expectancy, and said nothing.

"When I came into the room," Dr. Goodrich continued presently, "I naturally looked about to get my bearings, and I listened to McCarthy's story and the corroborative accounts of the policeman, while taking note of the position of Hartley's body, the way he grasped the revolver, and various minor details. To make a long story short, I may tell you frankly that after canvassing the entire situation, taking note of the direction of the bullet wound, and observing carefully just how the man's hand was clutched about the revolver, with a finger on the trigger, I was disposed to agree with the others that it was a suicide."

I ventured a comment showing that I recalled the case: "If I remember rightly, a report to that effect was given to the papers, and their early editions carried a story that Hartley had killed himself because of business reverses. He had been hard hit in Wall Street shortly before; and there were some domestic difficulties that lent color to the idea that he might be tired of life."

"Quite so. And of course all that was taken into account. But the main point was that the man was lying there with the revolver clutched in his hand; that the bullet had been fired with the muzzle against his side, or close to it, quite as if he had intentionally sent the bullet through his heart; and that there was no evidence of any scuffle and nothing at all to suggest that any one had been there. Naturally one in my position always thinks of murder in connection with such a case—it is my business to do so. But at first blush it seemed that the suicide hypothesis, which was the obvious one, was also the correct one."

BY THIS time I was naturally all agog, anxious to ask the doctor how he discovered that it was not suicide. But I knew better than to crowd him too closely. Long experience had taught me that when he has a story to tell he must be allowed to tell it in his own way. More than once I have seen him shut up like a clam when asked a leading question. I did not intend to make any such mistake. So I merely made a banal observation to the effect that Webster was doubtless disappointed that the case did not fall within his bailiwick,—suicides not being in the prosecuting attorney's line.

"He *was* frankly disappointed," said the examiner. "Why shouldn't he be? Prosecuting alleged criminals is his business. A prosecutor with no criminals to prosecute is like a doctor without patients. And I do not need to tell you how small a proportion of crimes lead to the revelation of a suspect that can be haled into court."

The physician was smiling outright now. Presently he added: "And this case came within an ace of being listed in that category. It was really the sheerest accident that changed the Hartley case, officially, from suicide to murder."

"The accident, if I mistake not," I said, forgetting my cue for the moment, "was that Dr. Goodrich was called in instead of some other examiner."

The physician frowned a little, but continued amiably: "You flatter me. I wish I might take the compliment to myself, but I fear I cannot justifiably do so. I have already frankly admitted that the case fooled me. Perhaps I should have said that it almost fooled me. In point of fact, I had just a suspicion from the outset that things were not quite what they seemed. This decision was founded on the observation that Hartley was holding the revolver in his left hand. I said nothing about this at the moment, but cast about to ascertain whether he had been a left-handed man. And at once I saw that this was not the case."

The medical examiner dearly loves to spring a surprise like that. Seeing my astonishment, he was as delighted as a boy who has played a joke on a schoolfellow.

"You saw that he was not a left-handed man?" I cried. "How could you see that, when the man was lying there dead?"

"Readily enough. There are many little signs that designate a left-handed man. If you think a moment you will recall some of them. A left-handed man, for example, carries his fountain pen in his left upper vest pocket, instead of the right one as you and I do. He carries his loose change and knife and key in the left-hand trousers pocket, just reversing our custom; and, contrariwise, he carries his handkerchief in his right-hand pocket instead of in the left. If you examine his gloves—and I found a pair in Hartley's overcoat pocket—you will probably observe that the right glove has been more used than the left; whereas a right-handed man uses the left glove more than the right, because he frequently puts that one on and leaves his more useful hand ungloved. These, and a number of other similar things, are readily observable."

"Very interesting clues," I commented. "I never thought of it before, but I shall now be watching people on the street, and picking out the south-paws."

"You will find it amusing. But to return to Hartley's case. I found no evidence of left-handedness. Indeed, there could be no question at all that he was a right-handed man. And when I had satisfied myself as to this, I put a little question mark after the 'suicide' pronouncement. 'Why should a right-handed man grasp a revolver in his left hand?' I asked myself."

"Might he not do it because he recalled that the heart is on the left side of the body?"

I made the suggestion solely to lead the doctor on. But he has a disconcerting way of taking your jokes seriously, just as he often takes your serious remarks as jokes. Now he rubbed his hands reflectively.

"THERE is a measure of plausibility in that suggestion," he said. "I considered it. But I was inclined to overrule it, because in my experience most men who use a revolver to shoot themselves, hold the weapon in their right hand. You know I see a good many suicides, and I do not recall an exception to this. So, as I say, I began to query that suicide proposition."

"And, as I have often heard you say, it is only when we begin to question things that we are in line of progress," I ventured. "Then we begin to see things."

The doctor nodded his head approvingly. "Quite so. But in this case I did not see anything at all. Of course I did not expect to see anything. Naturally there was no thought that the murderer would have remained in the room, or even in the building. It was obvious that Hartley had been dead for a good many hours. Rigor mortis had fully set in.

"I made tests with the thermometer—taking the temperature at various locations on the legs, you know—and found that the entire body was uniformly cold. There was every reason to believe, then, that death had taken place at least ten hours, perhaps twelve hours, earlier."

I was prompted to ask details about the thermometer test, but thought it better not to interrupt. The story was now going nicely.

"In other words," the physician continued, "it was pretty evident that Hartley had died not very long after office hours the day before. Hartley's bookkeeper had come in, and I questioned him as to whether there had been any one with his employer when he left the office, or whether there had been any unusual visitors during the day. He replied that Miss Costigan, the stenographer, was there when he left, but that she had her things on, apparently preparing to leave—it being six o'clock—and Mr. Hartley had left the office half an hour before, saying that he was going home for the night."

"That statement did not accord with the fact, did it?"

"So far as we could learn, it did. Hartley had indeed left the office, saying that he was going home; but in point of fact he returned about an hour later, having the appointment with Miss Costigan, as I have already said."

"He did not care to have the bookkeeper know about this appointment, I suppose."

"Naturally not. Nor did any one else enlighten us in this matter, for of course about six o'clock hundreds of people are going out of the building and no one notices who comes or goes. In a building with half a dozen elevators, fifty people might go in and out half a dozen times during the day, and it would be difficult to prove that any one of them had come or gone. The body of Hartley was there, however, to prove that he had returned to the office; and if my estimate as to the time of his death was correct, he had obviously returned not long after office hours. In point of fact, Miss Costigan had appeared to be putting on her hat and wraps only to camouflage the fact that she intended to remain. After the bookkeeper had gone she took her things off and waited for Mr. Hartley to return. Then things developed as I have already told you."

"BUT you have not told me where Miss Costigan was during all this time while you and Webster and the policeman and now the bookkeeper were having your conference there in the office."

At this the physician laughed outright. I knew from his manner that I was showing just the right amount of interest and puzzlement—not always an easy compromise to attain.

He was still chuckling as he said: "If I had told you that I should have spoiled my story. I will tell you now that at about the point which we have reached—that is to say, a few minutes after the coming of the bookkeeper—Miss Costigan appeared. She came through the door in the usual way, attired as was probably her custom, with hat and wrap, and with every appearance of having come from her home. She was a little mite of a girl, with plump cheeks, and big dark eyes. I noticed especially that her cheeks were red, as if she had been walking in the open air. There were great masses of chestnut-brown hair coiling from under the jaunty blue toque that she wore. About her neck and shoulders she had a handsome black-fox stole. She was a jaunty-looking little damsel, I assure you."

I have never been able to learn just why Dr. Goodrich remains a bachelor; but I do know that it is not because he does not appreciate the good points of a comely feminine face. He is no misogynist.

I ventured a bantering tone. "The description of a connoisseur," I said, "and an appealing picture. But where did she come from? You say she came in at the door quite as if nothing had happened?"

"Precisely so. She walked in with the jauntiest tread, and then stopped, with an air of surprise, at seeing so many people there; and then came forward and dropped her muff and gave a little scream and staggered back as she saw what was lying on the floor. Then it was that I noticed something that set me thinking."

"Something about Miss Costigan's appearance or manner?"

"Appearance *and* manner. Far be it from me to say how any one will normally act under peculiar circumstances. I have seen too many people act in too many different ways to have any dogmatic opinion on that subject. Nevertheless, it did seem to me that Miss Costigan's gasp and recoil were just a bit theatrical. But what I especially noticed was that, in spite of her apparent consternation, her cheeks did not pale in the least. She kept that splendid color, and of course that meant that the color was artificial. Now there is nothing astonishing in that. A great many girls use a little rouge nowadays, as I doubtless need not inform you. But Miss Costigan was of such a robust, healthy type, with such obvious natural advantages of complexion, that I was led to wonder at the quantity of color she had used that morning. Girls may paint up a bit before they go out for the evening; but sensible ones—and Miss Costigan evidently belonged in that category—do not usually come to the office overladen like that in the morning. So, as I said, this set me thinking."

Again Dr. Goodrich entered on one of his tantalizing periods of prolonged silence, in which he gives one the effect of having finished his discourse. I knew he would begin again presently; also that I should not hasten him by any inquiry. Nevertheless, it was difficult to maintain silence. I filled in the time by wondering just where Miss Costigan had been before her theatrical entrance; but my thoughts did not supply any satisfactory answer.

"NATURALLY we questioned the young woman," Dr. Goodrich resumed, "and we learned from her that she had left the office the night before just after the bookkeeper went out. She reminded him that she was putting on her hat as he went through the door; and of course he corroborated this, having already mentioned it.

"Had Mr. Hartley returned before she left? 'No, he had not returned.' And she of course did not see him again. He had left the office a little earlier, saying he was going home for the night. She locked up as usual, and went away, and dined by herself at a Broadway restaurant, and went to the movies, and then to her home. And now she had come to the office as usual, and naturally she was startled and horrified to see what she saw. She simply could not understand it. It seemed incredible—impossible. Why should he have done it? She could not make it out at all."

The narrator chuckled. "Sweet little prevaricator, she was! And she carried it off amazingly. She just could not 'make it out.' And I could not make *her* out. That was what I was thinking as I watched her and listened to her. I was more and more inclined to think that she was doing a nice piece of acting, but it was in my mind more as a suggestion than as a conviction. I kept thinking about the left-handed use of the revolver, however, and now I linked that reflection with what I saw of Miss Costigan's maneuvering. Then I began to think that perhaps I could make her out."

Walking back and forth now, his hands behind his back, his head in an attitude of reflection, the physician seemed to be absorbed in some obscure problem. Alternately he smiled a little and looked puzzled. Finally he stopped short.

"Yet I believe it was only by sheer chance that I went to the door and examined the lock, and then went out into the hall. I assure you that, so far as I can recall, I had no definite purpose in doing this. I like to be by myself when I am thinking, and I like also to walk during the process; and I may have had the subconscious intention to walk a bit in the hall to think things over. But, anyhow, that accidental pilgrimage of mine made all the difference—for Miss Costigan."

"Did it, indeed?" I ventured, too eager now to hold myself entirely in restraint. Fortunately the physician ignored my interruption.

"Why should I have looked back as I walked down the hall?" he mused. "Who knows just *why* he does any particular little thing like that? No one knows, of course. Most of our actions are automatic, linked up with past activities; associated in a thousand and one ways with past experiences, but with the links in the chain of causation sundered so that the path of association can never be retraced. But anyway, I did look back, and then I saw something that brought me to full attention. I was probably thinking only vaguely before—half dreaming; but now I was wide awake.

"WHAT I saw did not really amount to anything at all in itself. It was the implications of what I saw that were important. But then, that is often the case, is it not? I had seen the same sort of thing a thousand times, without having any emotion aroused by it. Yet now, I assure you, I was thrilled through and through with excitement.

"I shouldn't have been more surprised if it had been a ghost. And in fact, it was a thing almost as intangible—almost, but not quite. I saw a series of dainty little ghostly marks, about two feet apart, leading from the door of the office to the door of a stairway at the back of the hall. And I knew that these marks were made by the rubber heels of a woman's shoes. Doubtless you have often noticed that if a person walks on a somewhat dusty floor and then comes on clean linoleum, the rubber will make a little print that is like a half-tone done in dust, with the holes for the screws that adjust the rubber showing in a very characteristic fashion. You can often tell just how many people have walked about on a landing or a floor by examining these marks. Valuable clues on occasion.

"Well, the light was shining just the right way from the window at the front of the hall to bring the reflection of the little tracks out to the best advantage. Now I caught them distinctly. At almost any other angle they were invisible. But from just about the level of my head, at the point where I turned, they showed as plainly as half-tone pictures on paper. You see the hall had been scrubbed not long before, and only four or five people, all of them men, had come to the room. No woman, until the coming of Miss Costigan. Moreover, all the tracks of these men were on this side of the door—from the point where I was standing. But the heel tracks that I speak of led in the other direction."

"Ah, I begin to see the point!" I exclaimed. "This is interesting."

"It becomes more so when I tell you that there were two sets of these heel tracks, precisely alike except that one set led in one direction and the other in the opposite direction. In other words, the person who made the heel prints had made the trip in both directions between the two doors. She had either come and gone or she had gone and come. I hope you note the distinction."

"I do indeed," I assented. "But I do not quite see the application. The heel marks, I take it, were made by Miss Costigan, as there was no other woman in evidence. She had probably left the office earlier in the morning and secreted herself in the stairway—or perhaps gone up on the roof; and now she returned and came into the office, as you have described, intending to convey the impression that she had just come from home."

"You are partially correct, but you overlook one thing. I have stated that the hallway had been scrubbed only a little while before. The scrub woman was actually at work when I came to the office, not twenty minutes before I made the discovery of the heel tracks. Do you get the significance of that?"

"It begins to dawn on me. The trail going and coming—not coming and going—between the office door and that stairway door had been made after the floor was scrubbed; and therefore after you yourself had come to the office."

"Quite so. The evidence of that little series of heel prints was absolutely conclusive. And I assure you that it entirely upset my equanimity. Whoever made that trail had gone out of the office door and over to the stairway, and back again during the interval between the time when I entered the office and the time when I now had come out into the hall.

"THERE couldn't be any reasonable doubt as to who the person was, as no other woman had so much as come to the office door.

"But to make assurance doubly sure I went back into the office and called Miss Costigan out, and—standing just a little way down the hall—let her come to me in order that I might ask her a question. I made some excuse—asked about any suspicion she might have that any one had been there the day before who might have brought bad news to Mr. Hartley, or something of that kind. Then I let her go back into the room, in order that I might examine the heel tracks that she now made as they lay close beside those others. And a moment's comparison showed that they were identical. After that, of course the case was perfectly clear."

"The case perfectly clear!" I cried. "It is a long way from being clear to me."

"That is because you were not there. Had you been you would have noticed, as I immediately noticed when I went back into the office, that there is a closet just inside the office door, in which a variety of rubbish is stored. There were some boxes in there and a raincoat or two and an old overcoat hanging just at the entrance. There was no door to the closet, only a curtain; but the closet itself is several feet deep, and as it is far from the window, it is very dark. Any one hiding in there would not be observed unless you made a special search. And who would think to search in a closet for a murderer who had perfect liberty of action and might have escaped hours before? Especially when no one suspected there had been a murder. A pretty little episode, isn't it?"

"Very pretty indeed," I admitted. "But let me be sure that I get this quite right. Do I understand you to imply that Miss Costigan had been hiding in that closet all the time?"

"Just that. As I told you, she probably spent the night on the settee with or without sleeping. But when morning came, perhaps when she heard the janitor approaching in the hall outside, she slipped into the closet, following out a plan no doubt previously conceived; and she remained there until it was about the regular time for opening the office. Having arranged the revolver in Mr. Hartley's hand, so that it would seem like a suicide, she felt pretty sure that no one would be searching for a murderer. I need hardly tell you that she is an intelligent girl. She assumed that no one would look into that closet. And her assumption proved valid.

"BEING back there in the dark (I found a whole flock of her tracks in the dust), she could peep through a crack in the curtain and watch us, and of course hear everything that we said.

"When the proper time came, she had only to wait until all our backs were turned —we were twenty feet or so away, there in the main office, and the closet, as I said, is directly beside the door—and she could slip out, being careful to open and close the door quietly; and then make her little trip down the hall to the stairway door; and turn about and come back, entering the office with an air of coming to her everyday employment. Clever work, was it not?"

I readily agreed that cleverness and nerve had been required, adding that I marveled that the girl had thought she could "get away with it."

The doctor chuckled. "And yet she did get away with it," he cried. "It is true that I was just a little suspicious of her, as I told you, but I would not have pretended to let that suspicion weigh against her. I think I should scarcely have noticed anything peculiar in her actions, if I had not already made a mental query based on the fact that a right-handed man was holding a pistol in his left hand. That put me on the alert. But even so, nothing would have come of it, in all probability, had I not gone into the hall and chanced to see those little heel prints. They were the sole clue, you might say, and certainly the determining factor."

It was evident that the physician had come to the end of his story, as he regarded it. But I, very naturally, wanted to know a little more. At the risk of sealing the physician's lips—for I knew how reticent he could be if urged to talk—I said so.

"There is really nothing else to tell. You know the story. Miss Costigan, when I brought her out into the hall and showed her the evidence, had the intelligence to see that it was unanswerable. Had she been a less intelligent girl she would have fallen back on simple denials. Being the brainy girl that she was, she acknowledged defeat, and the way in which she did it was as characteristic of her as the deed itself."

"She confessed everything?"

"She hesitated for a few moments, apparently sizing up the situation, and then assured me that she would tell the precise truth about everything that happened. She told me the story as I told it to you a little while ago. She made no attempt to exonerate herself from all blame; admitting that she had remained for a surreptitious interview with her employer, and had promised to go with him to dinner and for an evening's entertainment. But she asserted very earnestly, and I believed her, that she had no thought of killing him, even when she took up the revolver. 'I just wanted to keep him away,' she cried, plaintively, looking right into my eyes.

" 'I believe you,' I told her. 'But I am afraid the case will have to be brought into court. If you tell your story there as you told it to me, I think the jury will believe that you acted in self-defense. At any rate you have no alternative. I must call in Mr. Webster and you must tell him what you have told me.'

"'VERY well,' she said without raising her voice. 'I am ready to do whatever is necessary.' "

The physician came back to his chair. His manner was again impassive. "You know the rest of the story," he commented casually.

"I recall that Miss Costigan went on the stand at the trial and made a splendid impression on the jury," I asserted.

"So good an impression," he declared, "that they gave her the benefit of the doubt. And I am inclined to think that justice was done. Of course the girl was not blameless. She should not have been there at that hour under circumstances that might make it necessary to protect herself. But her fault was sufficiently punished, I think you will agree, when she had endured several months' imprisonment in the Tombs and the awful ordeal of the trial."

To this I assented, adding: "But I cannot understand how the newspapers failed to get hold of the story you have just told me—the extraordinary tale of the heel-prints on the linoleum which played so important a part."

With a little deprecatory wave of the hand the physician explained: "There was no need to tell that story, as Miss Costigan made free admission of the fact that she had held the revolver at the time when it was discharged. There seemed no need of bringing out the fact that she had remained in the office overnight."

"Do you mean that that was not brought out at the trial?"

"It was never known to any one. You are the first person to have heard the story of the telltale heel prints."

"Dr. Goodrich," I cried, "I congratulate myself, and I nominate you for the world-championship medal for breaking all records for reticence."

The physician regarded me with amusement. "In telling you the story," he demurred, "I have obviously forfeited the right to accept your golden-silence medal." The smile broadened. "If you have a leather medal for loquacity, I might come in for that." He paused, and his look was still more whimsical. "Or perhaps a linoleum medal, with the print of a rubber heel on it, would be about the right thing."

In February EVERYBODY'S the medical examiner will tell of the crime that science couldn't prove.

Service

By Theda Kenyon

I WOULD not be some grave, gray-bearded sage
Had I the power—
To dwell above a struggling, sad-eyed world
As in a tower;
I would not prate of fear and sin and death,
With sky and sea
Mad with a pagan happiness
Mocking me!
Rather be mine the motley and the bells
Though my heart break,
That I may help some stark, deep eyes to smile,
Some parched lips slake. . . .
And if I serve men truly, may this be
My epitaph,
When on some future day my bells are still:
"She dared . . . to laugh!"

Hard as Nails

So Said Sam Brady. But, Hidden Away, She Had a Streak of Kindness and Romance

By Elsa Barker

Illustration by H. Weston Taylor

EXCEPT for a few visits to friends on Long Island, I spent a whole summer in Mrs. Brandon's house in West Twentieth Street.

Did you ever live in a furnished-room house in New York?

Now a boarding-house, that makeshift imitation of a home, has a certain pretense of stability; but through the house—and the mind—of the furnished-room landlady passes a never-ending stream of casual strangers, those Metropolitan nomads whose camp-fires are portable gas-stoves, whose hunting is job-hunting, and who graze their flocks of daydreams in the pastures of better times coming.

I used to admire the bluff courage of Mrs. Brandon, enforcing the laws of her house, judging strangers at a glance—accepting or rejecting them, doing all her own work, ordering people out of her house if they transgressed her rigid principles.

That's a fine name, Brandon, and of good New England stock she must have been—good, crude pioneer stock.

As her grim ancestors fought Indians, so she fought roomers—when she had to; but generally you might say that the pipe of furnished peace was passed between her and her surrounding nomads.

As I had the "front parlor"—there was running water in the farther corner with a pink Japanese screen around it—and as she slept in the back parlor, I often heard her talking, ruminating, scolding to herself behind the folding doors.

On hot summer evenings she would sometimes sit with her lodgers on the front steps; but one evening when a hall-room boy appeared there in his shirt-sleeves, she rose with the dignity of a duchess.

"Will you put on your coat like a gentleman? D'you think you're in a minin'-camp?"

Yes, she had character, our Mrs. Brandon. But what she was really like, under her shell, I had not even wondered—until the great scare began.

It was all about Sam Brady, who had a hall-room on the top floor—who had it, that is, until she put him out.

Brady had the size and the strength of a coal-heaver, a piano-mover; but he claimed—so Mrs. Brandon said—to have worked for a shipping firm in Hoboken. Perhaps, at some time or other in his variegated past. Now he was jobless, happy-go-lucky, lounging around in his old unpressed gray suit and cap, smoking his pipe of strong tobacco, his big bronzed face half covered with a gray and yellow unshaven stubble. But he was always ready with ingratiating smiles and pleasant words—sometimes too ready.

While Mrs. Brandon's forbears were fighting Indians, Sam Brady's must have been kissing the Blarney stone.

"He's slick enough for a crook," said Miss Parsons, a maiden of mature age whom Mrs. Brandon called the Third-floor-back. "I wouldn't want to meet him alone on a dark road."

I am sure that my landlady called me the Parlor; but Brady was always Brady on her tongue. Yes, she must have sensed vaguely from the beginning that his was a real personality.

THE young artist, Mr. Cabot, who roomed on the top floor, made several sketches of her, and she borrowed them one day to show to me. Pleased as a girl, she was—shyly flattered. I can see her standing there in her freshly ironed blue-gingham morning dress, the gray-blue of the gingham and of her eyes making her iron-gray hair look blue.

"Think of anybody wanting to make pictures o' me! If it'd been one of them girls, now, on the second floor—but me! A woman o' fifty!"

"Every age has its own beauty," I assured her.

"Never had an artist in my house before. Some folks say they don't pay their rent, but this one's the promptest top-floor-front I ever had."

She laid the sketches on a chair, and turned to make my bed.

"Wish I c'd say the same o' my whole top floor." She yanked the upper sheet away viciously.

"Why, is anybody—"

"Brady. Owes me fifteen dollars. If he had a trunk I c'd seize it, but he hain't got no baggage but an old straw suitcase, and almost nothin' in his bureau drawers."

I could see her looking through Brady's bureau drawers—telling herself that perhaps they might need relining with fresh newspaper.

"Maybe he'll get a job," I said, "and pay up."

"Humph!" She turned the mattress over with a flop. "I got two trunks in my basement now."

"Trunks?" I queried.

"Yes. Held 'em last June, for unpaid rent. A man and his wife."

I felt something like a cold hand on the pit of my stomach. This was a glimpse of the darker side of the nomad life.

"That's the law," she said grimly, closing the folding bed with a snap, and arranging the silk scarf and the vase on the top which carried out the illusion of its being a chest of drawers. "If it wa'n't for that law, they'd lots of 'em go without paying."

"But," I said, after a moment, "if Brady hasn't any money, how does he get his food?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You know, Mrs. Brandon, it makes one—uneasy."

"Well, if you want to know very bad, I give 'im a plate o' victuals every day for sweepin' the steps an' the area an' the sidewalk. 'Tain't worth it, but—"

She picked up the drawings of herself from the chair.

"I must take these pictures back to the top floor."

She stood there, tall and straight, looking back at me from the doorway.

"Mebbe you think I'm hard."

"Why—why, no!"

" 'Cause, if you do, you better keep furnished rooms for a while."

She went out, closing the door behind her.

Presently I heard strange sounds, which seemed to come from the upper part of the house: screams—expostulations—more screams.

I opened my door, and stood listening.

"*Fire!*" was the first word I caught clearly.

Then: "Stop screaming, Mrs. Brandon! It's out—don't you see, it's out?"

The firm tones were those of a man. The artist, I thought.

The woman's voice went on, high-pitched, excited; but rumbling through it was another man's voice, deeper than the first:

"Don't be so hard on a feller! 'Twas only me old pipe—"

"Asleep in the daytime, and smokin' in bed! You lazy good-for-nothin'!"

Then the treble and the bass began again, both together, and I went back into my room and closed the door.

"Brady!" I thought. "He's done for himself now."

AFTER two minutes, maybe, I heard the mingled voices coming down the stairs.

"Take your old straw-bag, and your one other shirt, and your old alarm-clock, and get out o' my house!"

"But, me dear lady, a body might fall asleep. I must have had it in me mouth—"

"And owin' me fifteen dollars! And ruinin' my good mattress!"

"Be cripes you are right! But go easy, Mrs. Brandon, for I'm gettin' out."

"Settin' the house afire—"

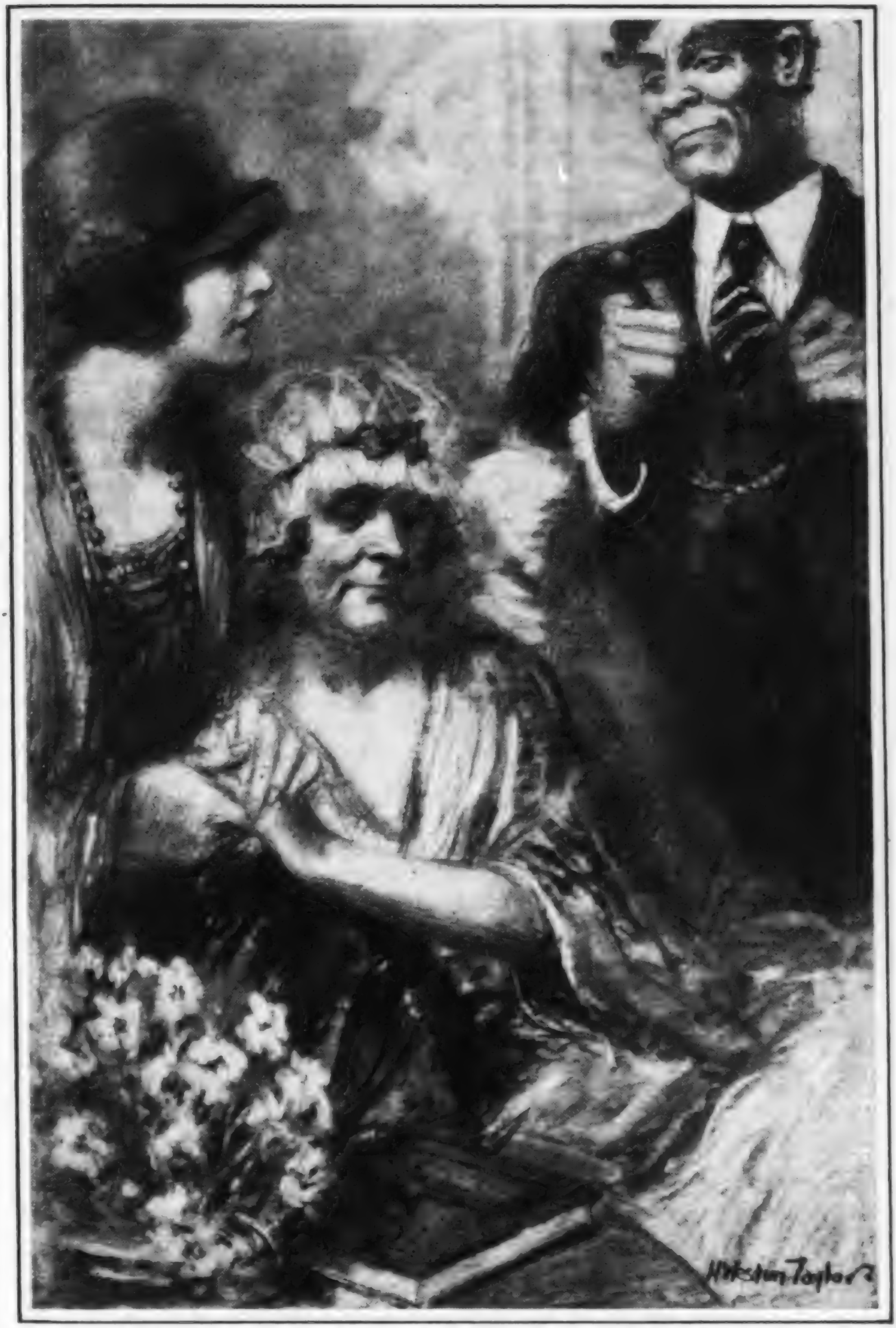
"Dear knows that it's sorry I am!"

"Not even a trunk to keep for security—"

"Ye're hard as nails, Mrs. Brandon."

"Don't you dare—"

"I say, ye're hard as nails."


H. Weston Taylor

She gave my fingers a little squeeze; then she raised her eyes to Brady. "Will you tell her—Samuel?" Samuel!

"And I givin' you your dinner—"

"And me after sweeping yer old area, madam, me that's been—"

"Gimme my latch-key!"

There was a moment's lull as they reached the front hall.

"There in yer hand it is! I kep' it in me breeches pocket, nice an' safe."

Bang went the big front door.

I ran to the window—I was so sorry for him. Yes, he was going down the steps. On the sidewalk he stood still a moment, turned, and regarded the house. In his left hand was the old straw suitcase; his burly shape was tumbled into the old unpressed gray suit; his collar was unbuttoned, his necktie streaming untied; on his head was the old gray cap, on his broad face—with the eyes too close together; I had not noticed that before—a queer look. Yes, it was a very queer look with which he regarded the house, nodding his head up and down—a subtle and secret look.

Then suddenly he turned away and walked down the street.

R*AP, rap, rap*, came the landlady's knuckle's on my door.

"Come in," I called.

There she stood, flushed, triumphant.

I went forward to meet her. "You must be terribly upset, Mrs. Brandon."

"Upset? Not at all." But she sank in the rocking-chair, and I also was glad to sit down.

"I'm so sorry. I hope there wasn't much damage."

"No—not much, I guess. I got some old pieces o' tickin' that'll make a patch. The sheet was half burnt up, but' twas only a ragged one."

As she sat there looking at me, I tried to think of some further appropriate remark.

"Well!" She began to rock back and forth. "That's one good riddance."

"Y-yes."

"Did you hear what he said?"

"Why—I couldn't help hearing—something."

"Hard as nails, am I?" Her demeanor was threatening.

"But you certainly had provocation—the fire—the danger."

"That man's been a trouble to me," she said, "since the day he set foot in my house. I guess the Third-floor-back was right; she always said he wa'n't no good. I'll bet my bottom dollar he just turns out a tramp—or worse. I guess that's the way it always begins."

She sat thinking, gazing into space. Looking up, I saw her lips quivering. A tear ran down.

"Why, Mrs. Brandon!" I leaned forward, put out my hand.

"You must think I hain't got no character"—her voice was tremulous—"but sometimes I get so sick o' this business—"

"Yes, I know—I know. But such a thing won't happen again. All your other lodgers—"

"But I never know what *might* happen. I ask 'em references, but a thief or a murderer might come in here and take a room. Sometimes they're awful slick. I get to thinkin' of it in the night, and I can't sleep. And then—other things. That couple with the trunks downstairs. She got awful thin while she was here. You know"—Mrs. Brandon sat forward in the rocking-chair, fixing me with her steel-blue eyes—"I thought they'd get the money somewheres, and come back and redeem the trunks. The other ones did—every time."

"Have you been in this business long, Mrs. Brandon?"

"Long enough—too long—most twenty years. If anybody'd told me when my husband died— There wa'n't much left o' the insurance money when the doctor's bills was paid and the fun'ral—just enough for my first month's rent of that house in Sixteenth Street and some second-hand furniture. I thought lettin' rooms'd give me an easy life. Easy! Not much! Once I was dispossessed, and hed to begin all over again. Mebby I *am* hard as nails."

"Don't!" I coaxed her. "Don't think about that any more."

She was silent again—looking into space. Then she came back.

"I might o' gev Brady two dollars."

I couldn't say a word.

"You know"—she sat picking at the fringe on the arm of the rocking-chair—"I keep thinkin' o' that song he was always singing round the house—you remember: 'I ain't so young as I useter be.' "

"But really," I smiled, "he can't be more than forty-five."

"Forty-eight, he claimed. That's beginnin' to be old."

She got up, with a sigh. "I'll put the furnished-room sign on the door."

As I went out to the restaurant for my luncheon, I wondered if Brady was eating—somewhere.

Later in the day it began to rain.

Toward six o'clock Mrs. Brandon appeared with a freshly ironed towel. As she hung it on the rack in the corner, behind the pink Japanese-screen, she muttered:

"Rains awful hard, don't it? I wonder . . ."

Yes, I knew what she was wondering.

DURING the days that followed, when I saw her sweeping the steps and the area and the sidewalk, I knew she was thinking of the colorful nomad who had done that hard work for his "plate o' victuals." Self-interest was on the side of the lost Brady.

So I was more amused than astonished when I came home one evening and found Brady sitting on the front steps after dinner, contentedly smoking his pipe.

"It's the real owld cook is Mrs. Brandon," he smiled, "and hurroosh to her soul! The mere thought of her fried pitaties would make an angel's mouth water."

On her way to market, my landlady had met him hanging round the neighborhood—still jobless, still ready with his blarney, "Och, and it's good for sore eyes to see yer kindly face once more, Mrs. Brandon. It is that." And she had offered him the storeroom behind the kitchen and all his meals, till he should "find a job."

"And he's going to keep all the halls clean and the windows washed," she explained to me the next morning. "I gev him two dollars last night, to buy a stock o' tobacco."

Leaning on the broom-handle, she mused: "I dunno what the Third-floor-back'll say."

I went down to East Hampton that day for a week's visit, and on my return I found the house shining—windows bright as astronomers' lenses, hall carpets swept till they looked like new, banisters brilliant with polish. And as Sam Brady worked, he sang.

No, the great scare had not begun yet. But it came soon enough—when the mystery of Brady was partly revealed. You would never have thought from seeing his bullet head outlined against the window-pane that he polished, polished—you would never have thought how deep and winding-subtle were his plans regarding us.

"Ye see, ma'am," he said to me one day as he washed the window-sashes, "it's sorra a scrap o' good luck that I've had this year. I do be gettin' too hefty for me business. And hivens above, it's not safe for ye to sleep with them winders open, right here on the ground floor. A light chap could be swingin' himself round from the steps."

He turned to Mrs. Brandon, who was dusting my mantelpiece. "If ye'll give me twinty-five cints, I'll get four little chains and four strong nails, and be after makin' this lady some side-catches for these winders. They'll be the grand thing, and it's safe ye'll become. Ye aren't careful enough, Mrs. Brandon. Them gentry goes first for rich folks, but many's the modest house that's been entered, and stripped of its breeches and coats."

As she gave him the quarter, he added:

"I be after findin' a nice bit-stock in yer tool chist under the stairs. I can do the grand job in a jiffy."

That night I slept burglar-proof, with a six-inch aperture at the top and bottom of each window for fresh air.

And now my landlady, relieved of much hard labor, had "a little time for settin'," usually under the tall scraggly tree in the grassless back yard. Sometimes I joined her there with a book.

One day Brady came out from the basement door and stood looking up at the tree.

"The job is to cut that dead limb off up there, Mrs. Brandon. It goes wrong with the looks o' the yard."

She raised her eyes to the dead limb, jutting out in naked ugliness some fifteen feet above our heads.

"Humph! Who'd do it," she demanded, "without chargin' me a lot?"

The big man laughed. "And me spilin' to make meself useful!"

"*You?* How c'd you get up there—heavy as you be?"

He came over to where we sat under the tree.

"I do be thinkin' that ye never dreamed in me youth 'twas a sailor I was."

He bared his brawny right arm to show us a tattooed bouquet of roses and foliage, in red and blue ink.

"In West Africa did I have it done, and

there's more on me chist and on me left hind leg. Apt ye'll be now to believe, ma'am, that I could go up a tree. On the seven seas a hundred masts have I been after climbin'. Four times round the Horn, and twicet round the Cape of Good Hope have I been. Och, and I've had what the two of yous might well be callin' a career, ladies, in more ways than one—more ways than *one*."

He was raising and lowering himself on his toes—smiling, expanding with pride at the effect he had produced.

"And a fine saw did I see in yer kitchen cupboard a day or two gone. Will ye be waitin'?" And he disappeared into the basement.

"Land sakes!" said Mrs. Brandon.

In a moment he returned, with the saw and a piece of rope.

He made a noose of the rope, hung the saw on his back, then—lightly and easily—he began to swarm up the tree. He might have weighed only a hundred pounds, instead of two hundred and twenty.

"And it's sorry I am to be disturbin' ye," he called down from above; "but a dead limb's kinder rotten, ye know, and splinters and sawdust in yer bootiful eyes ye might be gettin'."

We went and stood together in the basement door, watching him.

HE BEGAN to sing, up there among the wind-stirred leaves, some thrilling alien song I had never heard. And the saw began to sing. And in a little while—*crash* came the dead limb down on the ground under the tree.

Down came the sailorman that was—landing lightly. With the saw in his hand he came toward us.

"And it's the grand kindling that bough'll be makin' for you, Mrs. Brandon. To chop it up I'll be hustlin' in the morning."

"I'm sure I'm much obliged," she said.

"Don't be mentioning it, ma'am," he replied airily. "The pleasure is all me own. And it's up that drain-pipe there, on the side o' the house, I could as easily be going. Would ye like to be watchin' me do it?"

"No, no!" she cried, really alarmed. "You'd tear it loose from the house!"

"Dear knows there's no need to be wailin'," he grinned; "it was only me little joke."

He went into the basement to replace the saw, and we heard him singing away to himself in there: " 'I'm the man that broke the bank at Monte Carlo.' "

Yes, his little fling had done him good.

But I should have known that the calm which now brooded over our house was the prelude to thunder and lightning.

Later in the day, as I was walking along the street toward home, I saw Brady coming up the steps from the basement, with the old straw suitcase in his hand.

"I'm just after bein' put out of it," he sighed.

"Again!" I exclaimed.

"Aye, lady, and me steerin'-gear's broke. It is that."

"But I don't understand—"

"Och, I've done down meself this time. An' everything. God help us! I'm suppin' distress from the bowl o' regret. But will you say to that dame back there—she's hard as nails, ma'am, that she is—will ye tell her I've taken to heart them last words she gev me?"

"Yes, Brady, I'll tell her. I'm sorry."

"Thank ye, ma'am, thank ye. It's hopin' I was to be leading a nobler life, but fortune's dead agin me."

He was off again, into that vast unknown where homeless men go. Whatever could he have done this time, I wondered.

I was just removing my hat, before the mirror, when Mrs. Brandon burst into my room. Her face was deadly pale.

"That scoundrel!" she cried. "He's gone off with the key o' my house! He's carried off my latch-key! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! And he could walk right in here in the middle o' the night and murder us all in our beds!"

I tried to soothe her, made her sit down on the couch and tucked a pillow behind her back. But she only moaned:

"Oh, it'd serve me right for harborin' the wretch! I've always known I'd be murdered sometime, takin' strangers into my house, harborin' I don't know who—from God knows where! And now my key! my key!"

"BUT, Mrs. Brandon!" I sat down beside her on the couch, stroking her worn hand. "Brady wouldn't hurt us. I met him in the street, just now, and he asked me to tell you he'd taken to heart your last words to him."

"My last words?" Her steel-blue eyes were wide and staring.

"Yes, Mrs. Brandon. I suppose you offered him some good advice—"

Her eyes snapped fire, and she brought her fist down on the couch with a force that jarred me.

"Advice? I told him to go back to the devil where he came from!"

My good angel preserved me from laughter. She could not have endured laughter just then.

She caught me by the arm.

"Promise me—promise me you won't tell nobody that scoundrel ran off with my key."

"But why—"

"Promise me! There wouldn't nobody feel safe— I'd lose my roomers. That Third-floor-back is nervouser'n a cat."

"But, my dear woman, he lived right here in the house with us—"

"Yes, yes, but that was before I knew what he was. Now it's different. Will you promise me?"

I promised not to tell Miss Parsons, or anybody else.

"But what has he done?" I insisted.

She rose, tall and gaunt, brushing back a wisp of her iron-gray hair which had broken loose in her agitation.

"For the good name o' my house, I'm not goin' to tell nobody the kind o' miscreant I've had a-livin' here. You wouldn't none of you be able to sleep nights. Oh, my Lord!" She turned to me again, wide-eyed. "What am I sayin'? You won't be leavin' me, maybe? I never thought o' that."

"Of course I won't leave you."

When she was gone, I sat quietly thinking it over. Yes, after that showing-off in the back yard, Brady must have confided to her some horror of his past, boasting of it, of course—as he would.

At ten o'clock that night she came to my door again.

"I just thought," she said, in an awed whisper. "That drain-pipe!"

"What drain-pipe?"

"Why," she breathed, "that drain-pipe from the roof—on the back o' the house—the one he offered to climb. It goes right by the back windows, all the way up."

"But you're just nervous, Mrs. Brandon. How could he get into the back yard?"

"He could come in the front door with that key, go down to the basement and out the back door."

"But why in the world—"

"Folks lock their doors at night, I suppose," she worried on; "but this weather nobody can't lock their windows."

I finally persuaded her to go to bed. But through the folding doors between her room and mine I heard her muttering to herself at intervals—low muttering, smothered by pillows. I caught only the repeated word, "Awful! Awful!"

But really, I thought, one must have common sense. If Brady was going to turn housebreaker, he wouldn't begin by coming back here—would he?

I remembered that strange look of his, when he turned and regarded the house, after his first expulsion. Perhaps he was deeper than I thought.

The next morning Mrs. Brandon sent for a carpenter, and had side-catches made for the windows of her own room, the back parlor, precisely like those which Brady himself had made for me, though her windows were fifteen feet above the level of the back yard. And she began to talk about buying a new lock for the front door.

"Don't be a goose!" I said. "A good spring-lock, with twenty pass-keys for your lodgers—it might cost fifteen dollars!"

THE second night I was awakened by a rapping—rapping.

"Yes?" I sat up in bed, confused, looking round in the darkness.

"It's me," came Mrs. Brandon's voice from behind the folding doors between her room and mine.

I got out of bed and went over there.

"What's the matter? Are you ill?"

"No, no! Didn't you hear somebody come into the house and go upstairs?"

"I was asleep."

"Won't you throw on something and come out in the hall?" she pleaded. "I'll come out, too."

"Very well." Drowsily I picked up my dressing-gown.

She met me at the foot of the stairs, caught hold of my hand. Thus encouraged by something human to hang on to, she called out:

"Who's there? Who's on the stairs?"

"It's I, Mr. Cabot. Is anything the matter, Mrs. Brandon?"

"No—no, thank you. I just wanted to know who it was."

A day or two later Mrs. Brandon told me that the young married woman whose trunks she was holding for unpaid rent, had come to the door asking shyly if she might not get a few yards of muslin from one of the trunks. She had to make certain small garments.

"You c'd just have knocked me over with a feather!" my landlady said, the tears rising in her eyes. "I told the poor critter to take her trunks, both of 'em, and pay me when she could. And then she just bust out a-cryin' and said that God'd reward me. Now I won't never get the money on them trunks."

From that moment I began really to love Mrs. Brandon.

And so I was troubled when she began to talk about giving up the house, and finding some other place in a different quarter of the city. "I want to get out o' this neighborhood," she said.

There *was* something, then, more serious than I had supposed. Could it be that Brady was a convict, a sort of Irish Jean Valjean? I had not thought of that before.

Then a new idea came to me—a startling one. Could the man have had something to do with her own past life? He was already in the house when I came there.

I soon discovered that she was apprehensive of meeting Brady in the street, as had happened that other time when she brought him back. When she was obliged now to go out on an errand, I would see her looking furtively up and down as she crossed the street—heedless of passing vehicles. Once she dodged across in front of an automobile, and I heard the chauffeur yell at her. Another time I saw her running toward the house, as if something were pursuing. Yes, she was going through a crisis—there could be no doubt of it.

In some way she must have conveyed the influence of her anxiety to Miss Parsons, the one who was "nervouser'n a cat," for the Third-floor-back gave notice and moved out.

"Said she was goin' to a boardun'-house, where she'd feel more secure. Did you tell her anything?" Mrs. Brandon eyed me keenly.

"I did not."

"Well, I think it's very queer. I must be goin' in for a run o' bad luck."

The following week another room was vacated.

"They said I didn't keep my house clean!"

She was thoroughly aroused at this reproach, and she began to work overtime with sweeping and polishing.

The second room was soon retaken, but the third-floor-back remained obstinately vacant.

"I think that scoundrel's hoodooed my house!" she declared one day. "He told me about it himself—things he'd seen done in Africa—bad folks wishin' evil on others."

"Oh, Mrs. Brandon! You're just imagining."

"Imagining, am I? I guess you don't know much o' nothin' about the evil in this world. Nothin' would surprise me—no kind of bad luck comin' to me."

She was a better prophet than I thought. One morning as she was crossing the street in the middle of the block, looking furtively to right and left for that scoundrel, she was knocked down by a passing automobile and her leg was broken.

THEY brought her into the house—she refused to go to the hospital—and there in her own back parlor the doctor put her leg in a plaster cast, and she would be fixed, immovable, for weeks to come.

"Didn't I tell you?" she said to me triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you bad luck was comin' to me? Who's goin' to clean the rooms, and make the beds, and answer the doorbell, and me flat on my back?"

It seemed to be my job to find a servant and I brought one home that afternoon from a neighboring employment agency.

I had been planning to go down to Great Neck for a week's visit, but I postponed it for two days.

"And my third-floor-back still vacant," Mrs. Brandon muttered, "and me with a servant, lyin' here on my bed like a queen on 'er throne, bein' waited on! A nurse, did you say? Think I got an oil well in the back yard?"

But notwithstanding the pain she must have suffered, how she did enjoy issuing orders to that servant! I had brought her a big raw-boned Swedish girl, a good girl who was really sorry for that keen-eyed eagle lying there with the broken wing—leg, I mean.

The doctor had said that Mrs. Brandon

must have no visitors that first night; but the news of her accident went right through the house, and all her lodgers came down to my room with offers of assistance. Kind souls, they were, willing to run errands, to make their own beds, to do anything else which might help her.

As the car which had knocked her down belonged to a well-known man, who denied responsibility because of her carelessness, the accident was reported at some length in the newspaper the next morning.

I took the paper to her room and read the story aloud to her.

"Well, well!" She was smiling—pleased, flattered. "If I'd known they was goin' to print all that, I'd have got Mr. Cabot to lend 'em one o' them pictures he made o' me. That smilin' one makes me look awful nice."

She referred to this oversight again and again through the day. Such an opportunity would not repeat itself—to have her picture in the paper.

As she had slept during the night, the doctor said she might have callers now; so I made her look as nice as possible—lying there in bed. I put a pink chiffon scarf of mine around her shoulders, and a pink boudoir-cap on her iron-gray head. Then I gave her a hand-mirror.

"Land sakes!" she breathed. "I hain't worn pink since I was eighteen. Do you think—" She raised her eyes to my face. "Do you think that a teeny bit of—of rouge—"

I had not dared to suggest it, because of her stern principles. But that teeny bit of rouge was the final touch of perfection, and it helped her morale.

" 'Twon't be more'n two months," she said, laying down the hand-mirror, "before I'll be spryer'n a kitten."

She moved a little—easing the strain on her leg.

Between five and seven o'clock her lodgers came in to see her, one after another. Yes, she was indeed "like a queen on 'er throne," and to each caller she showed the newspaper report.

"Isn't she a bird?" young Cabot whispered to me in the hall. "I believe she's enjoying every minute of it. I saw my lawyer on her behalf, and he tells me that rich man in the automobile has offered to settle the case for five hundred dollars cash. She's lucky to get anything—in the circumstances."

As soon as the others were out of the room, he told her of this offered settlement.

"Five hundred dollars!" She just lay there—looking from him to me. "Why, that's more money than I've hed since I got Mr. Brandon's insurance. And they say it was all my own fault! Well—my luck must've turned, that's all."

WE HAD sent the Swedish girl to the drug-store to get a prescription filled. Soon after Mr. Cabot went out, the doorbell rang.

"I'll answer it," I said.

But when I opened the street door I nearly fell backward.

"Good evenin', ma'am," said Brady.

"Good evening," I answered weakly.

He stepped in, as if he still belonged there. But—what was this transformation?

He was clean-shaven, dressed in a natty blue suit, a spotless collar, cuffs—yes, *cuffs!* And in his hand was a newspaper.

"I'm after reading about the accident"—he removed a brand-new straw hat—"and it's right round I came, when me work was done. There'll be things that want doing, I says to meself. If I keep me hand off, it's that short the poor lady will be."

Well! I just stood there—staring at him.

"And it's in 'er own room that I'll find her?" He shut the front door behind him.

"But wait! Wait!" I gasped. "I must tell her first. I don't know—"

I did not have to tell her. She had heard every word, through the open door.

"Have you brought back my key?" she called out.

"I have that, Mrs. Brandon."

"Then you come straight here and give it to me—quick!"

As we entered the room she was glaring—ready for combat. Then, as she took in the picture of Brady:

"Well, of all this world!" she breathed.

"Aye, and it's herself!" He stepped forward briskly, shook hands with her. Then he brought forth a key-ring, twisted a latch-key from it and placed it in her palm.

"Sed down!"

He sat—and so did I.

"Dear knows that it's sorry I am to learn of yer accident, Mrs. Brandon. I'd have been round this mornin' to offer me help, but it's workin' I am at me old trade of house-painter, *and* at tin dollars a day. Me boss says I won't niver be out of a job, now that buildin's beginnin' again."

"Ten dollars a day!"

She looked from his clothes to his shaven face, and back again to his clothes.

"It was lazy, discouraged or somethin' I'd been, with me thoughts about gettin' old. Broodin' and smokin' and broodin' and smokin'. And 'twas up in the tree in yer own back yard that I changed the tune o' me thoughts."

"But how did you get this fine job?" I asked Brady.

"I'm thinkin', lady, it was distiny. The day that I—lift the house here, I found meself thinkin' and thinkin' and thinkin' of a man that I used to know. He was me boss a good while back, and bowldly I wint to his place. He's a divil, he is that, a divil. But he gev me me owld job again, and at twicet the money."

"You just found yourself thinking of him—of this devil of a man?" I cried.

"Aye, lady, by the guidance o' wan o' the saints."

"By the guidance of Mrs. Brandon," I laughed. She had told him to go to the devil.

"And now if ye have a nice room," said Brady, "it's takin' it I'd like to be."

I GASPED. Yes, he certainly had impudence. I looked at Mrs. Brandon—expecting her to break out.

But she was weighing him with her eyes, hesitating, keen, thoughtful.

"My third-floor-back's to let. Ten dollars a week."

Had something in the doctor's medicine affected her mind?

"Now ain't I the lucky man?" Brady was beaming on her, he was beaming on me. "I'll be payin' ye now for the room, Mrs. Brandon, and—and that other fifteen dollars, and be leppin' round to git me trunk."

"Trunk?" Mrs. Brandon echoed him. "Trunk?"

Then with dignity, with gravity, she held out her hand for the money.

As he turned to go, she called him back.

"Here! Take yer key. You can let yerself in. My *servant* has gone on an errand."

And she gave him back that key!

When Brady was out of the house I went to my own room, bewildered.

The third-floor-back room let, at last—to the scoundrel of her terrors! But really—really . . .

Yes, she must have lost her memory. But whatever his lurid past might have been, this was her house, and she had accepted his rent.

Tomorrow morning I was going to Great Neck for that postponed visit, and before my return she might come to herself. Mr. Cabot would be here to help her—if she needed his help, or advice.

So when Brady returned with his new steamer-trunk on a taxi, I asked him to go to his room and not to disturb Mrs. Brandon.

"And it's right ye are, ma'am; she'll be needin' her rist. Bright and early I go to me work, but tomorrow evenin' I'll be able to lind her a hand. There'll be things cryin' out to be done."

When I went in at ten o'clock to say good night to my landlady, I did not mention Brady, nor did she. The medicine the Swedish girl had brought was already making her drowsy.

The next morning she showed no sign of remembering that Brady had taken a room.

"Have a good time at Great Neck, and don't worry about me. Ain't it just wonderful—gettin' that five hundred dollars?"

"But you'll have Mr. Cabot put it right in the bank for you? Promise me—promise me that."

"I don't take no chances with money," she said.

Then I made her a present of the pink scarf and cap.

"So you won't forget *me* while I'm gone," I smiled.

"Oh, I never forget nothin'!" was her enigmatic answer.

I pondered the problem all the way out on the train. In morbid terror of Brady when she was active and strong—apparently fearless of Brady when she lay in a plaster cast, helpless!

Could it be the ten dollars a day—the new clothes? But that was too silly! Does a job reform a scoundrel? No, Mrs. Brandon was deep—deep.

AFTER five days I came back to the house, about nine o'clock in the evening. Leaving my bags in my room, I hurried down the hall to my landlady's open door.

Yes, there she lay—still in the pink fluffy things, with "a teeny bit of rouge." And beside her sat the incomparable Brady, smoking a fine cigar.

He leaped to his feet when he saw me, his broad face beaming with smiles.

"And how have you been, Mrs. Brandon?" I asked, going over and taking her hand.

She gave my fingers a little squeeze; then she raised her blue eyes to Brady.

"Will you tell her—Samuel?"

Samuel! I caught my breath.

"I engage it's surprised you will be, but she's not Mrs. Brandon no more. We was married—the two of us—yistiddy."

"Brady!" I cried. "*Brady!*"

"I'd the wish in me mind," he said gravely, "sence the day I first looked on 'er face."

My amazement grew—became speechless.

"There's the makin's in it of a hiven on earth, ma'am," said the bridegroom, "and I've promised her if she has children, that they're to be brought up Prodstint."

I stole a glance at the bride—but she did not bat an eyelash. She who was hard as nails—oh, I could not believe what I heard!

Then the new Mrs. Brady laughed, a funny little laugh.

"Wonder what the Third-floor-back—I mean Miss Parsons—would say."

"And was that the old maid?" Brady chuckled. "I winked at her oncet, I did, but 'twas only to see what she'd do."

The mention of Miss Parsons gave an outlet for my laughter, without which I should have smothered.

"And now," said Brady, "I'll be leavin' ye togither, while I lock up the cillar and the back door. And it's eat up with pride that I am, to be lockin' me own back door. She had counted it sin to think on me, but no more by the grace o' God." And he left me alone with his wife.

"MY DEAR, my dear!" I was breathlessly leaning over her. "You must tell me now—you must tell me—what Mr. Brady did—that time—you know—that time—"

"Sed down," she said gently, "sed down. I'll tell *you*, but don't you tell nobody."

She smiled—then she sighed—then she smiled.

"He grabbed me and kissed me, he did. Think of it—grabbin' me—a woman o' my age and principles! Grabbin' me—in my own kitchen! I hadn't never thought of him—not in that way—before. But I hain't ben able to think o' nothin' else ever since. Grabbin' me—"

"Oh, you're wonderful!" I whispered. "Wonderful! And that's why you were afraid—that's why you were afraid of him!"

She patted my hand, then she held it.

A queer little smile flickered over her face.

"I guess so. I guess so. I must've ben awful silly—I mean about the drain-pipe, an' his comin' in with that key in the night, an'—an' everything."

She snuggled my hand against her cheek.

"You know," she whispered, "you know where my feelin's are concerned, I'm *just as soft as putty*."

A Complete Novel in February

The Goat Without Horns

By Beale Davis

IN CUTTING the Gordian knot that binds Thérèse Simone to Haiti, Felix Blaine finds that he must cope with the ominous powers of darkness. "The Goat Without Horns" is a dramatic picture of barbarous practices and breathless adventure on an island where anything might happen—and does.

February *EVERYBODY'S* Out January 15

A Novel Complete in This Issue

LAND'S END

Where Romance Even Now Has Its Stronghold and Adventure Its Lair—as Two New Yorkers Prove for Themselves

By William Almon Wolff

Illustrations by Harry T. Fisk

PEYTON ASHE—most people called him Pete—finished balancing his check book, after an hour's exhausting work, and found that there remained to his credit eleven dollars and sixty-three cents. Much concerning Pete will be revealed, probably, by the statement that the result gave him considerable pleasure. The figures, to be sure, were not large; most men, contemplating so slender a balance, might have been depressed. Not Pete. He had undertaken the horrid task of balancing the book simply because of a still more horrid fear that his account was overdrawn. And they had spoken sternly about that at the bank, the last time he had been there. Accordingly the fact that there was any balance at all delighted him.

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning when Pete finished his mathematical labors. He knew he ought to work, because, after all, eleven dollars and sixty-three cents wouldn't go very far, and no one owed him any money; no one, that is, who was at all likely ever to pay up. He knew that if he settled down to it, and turned out a decent lay-out, Campbell would order it—and pay well for it. He also knew that if he called up any one of three or four art editors he knew, he could get a story to illustrate.

The trouble was that he didn't feel like doing anything of the sort. He wanted to paint. He wanted to paint outdoors, miles from the city—preferably on a beach, among sand dunes, at sunset. Sand took the most extraordinary colors just at sunset.

But he couldn't afford to do any painting. He glanced around at innumerable unsold canvases. He wasn't a bit cast down by the sight; the way he put it to himself was that he'd a lot rather keep them, and sell them himself, later, when his price had gone up, than know how dealers were cashing in on his success. But, just the same, he had no right to do any painting. If he'd done less of it in the past, and more illustrating and commercial stuff, he'd be able to do all he liked of it now. He knew that there was something wrong with that line of thought, and yet that, fundamentally, it was sound common sense.

Anyway, if he'd made more money, a lot of things would be different now. He'd have a better chance, for instance, with Elizabeth. He had a profound conviction that one of the reasons she treated him so abominably was that he had no money, as a rule. Not that he put her down as mercenary, at all; he knew she wasn't. But she probably regarded the ability to make money as extremely desirable in a husband, and he was obliged to admit that a good deal was to be said for that idea. Of course she was engaged to Denniston, too, but that, somehow, didn't seem to matter very much.

Very naturally, since he ought to have

done one sort of work and wanted to do another, he did neither. And yet, before the bank closed that afternoon, his balance had risen from eleven dollars and sixty-three cents to forty-seven thousand, eight hundred and forty-one dollars and nineteen cents.

THE way Pete came to acquire the additional $47,829.56 was entirely simple and natural. The postman came, downstairs, and knocked and whistled and shouted, and generally made a nuisance of himself, until Pete went down, and found that he had a registered letter. It was from a law firm in Cleveland, and it informed Pete that final settlement of the estate of his uncle, George Turner Ashe, had been made, and that a draft on New York for the amount due to him, payable to his order, was enclosed.

The lawyers seemed to regard the whole thing as absurdly commonplace. The letter wasn't even properly signed; Mr. Johnson, a rubber stamp assured him, had dictated it, but had left the office before it was typed. So some stenographer had signed it for him. This was, it seemed to Pete, an extremely perfunctory way in which to transact important business.

He wasn't simply surprised; he was stunned, overwhelmed, amazed. He had known, of course, that his uncle George was dead; he'd heard that rather more than a year ago. He had made appropriate comment upon the sad occasion, which had reminded him, for the first time in several years, that he had an Uncle George, and then had forgotten all about him. Later these same lawyers had written him a long letter, telling him that his uncle had died intestate—which, he remembered thinking, had seemed to him something for a doctor, rather than a lawyer, to write about, if it was necessary to go into such matters at all. After all, the old boy was dead—*de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, and all that.

The lawyers had, unquestionably, done their duty, so far as the fact that they had never set eyes on Pete permitted. They had kept him fully informed of developments—at least, their letters would have kept any one who could have translated their legal verbiage into English fully informed. Pete ought to have known that his uncle had died, without issue, and without a will, leaving an estate of nearly two million dollars.

But the idea that any of these things had any personal meaning or significance for him simply never got across to him until he sat fingering that draft. It looked all right. When he took it up to the bank and asked what he ought to do with it, the teller took it away from him, and held it while he wrote his name on the back, and assured him that it was so very much all right that the bank would gladly honor his check for $47,841.19.

He wandered out into the street in a somewhat dazed condition, convinced that there was a catch somewhere. Then he went back, and, tentatively, wrote out a check for two hundred and fifty dollars, and, thereafter, did something that struck him as distinctly clever. He presented the check to another teller, who looked at it, and then at him—he knew Pete—as if he felt that practical jokes represented an extremely low form of humor.

"Just a minute," he said, and disappeared, to a telephone placed so as to be out of hearing of any one at the window.

Pete knew what he was doing, though, and his feelings weren't hurt at all.

The bank was very nice; it always cashed his checks without bothering to verify his balance, when they weren't for more than ten dollars. And he was, as a matter of fact, extremely glad that the teller hadn't given him the money right away, because, though his knowledge of such matters was pretty vague, Pete had an idea that you could be arrested for cashing a check when you didn't have money enough in the bank. Whereas, of course, when the chap returned, and pushed the check back at him and told him it was no good, he could tell him what the other fellow had said about that draft, and they could see that he hadn't been to blame. Just as he was getting all this thought out the teller came back, looking surprised, and asked him how he would have it. Pete being quite unable to answer, the teller gave him twenty-five ten-dollar bills, and the man behind him in the line gave him a discreet push to wake him up, and he went out, more dazed than ever, with his hand in his trousers pocket, clutching the crisp roll of bills.

When he was in the street again, Pete realized, definitely, that life had changed;

that he faced a wholly new situation, which had to be met with firmness.

"Gosh!" he said to himself. "Holy cat!"

IT WASN'T the fact that he was rich, exactly, that was so staggering. He'd never been really poor; he just had never had any money, which is a wholly different thing. He hadn't, as a matter of fact, made less than seven or eight thousand dollars in any given year since he had settled down in New York, and he had never, so far as he could remember, ever more than five hundred dollars at any given time, or owed less than three or four hundred.

And now he had—he tried to do a sum in mental arithmetic, but the street was pretty crowded. Well, very nearly fifty thousand dollars. Slowly the thing grew on him. He could—Lord, he could do just as he jolly well pleased! Paint—paint all the dunes and sunsets he liked! Go anywhere he pleased. The idea of movement appealed to him. He beckoned to a passing taxi.

"Right—where to, boss?" said the driver, holding the door open.

"Well, it's this way," said Pete. "I want to buy a car. What kind would you get?"

"How much you want to pay?" asked the driver.

"I don't know—what do you think?"

"I got you," said the driver. "Say—take a tip from me. Don't you buy no new car. You get in and I'll take you to a gyp. He's one grand guy. He'd leave his old grandmother carfare if he met her in an alley on a dark night—he's got just that big a heart. But he can't put anything over on me, see? And he knows it and won't try to start anything—see? You just keep quiet and leave it to me."

Here was a man, plainly, after Pete's own heart. He got in, and admired prodigiously the way his driver darted in and out of the traffic. Pretty soon he would be doing likewise. He began putting on the brakes himself in Times Square; thanks to his aid, they achieved a turn on two wheels in the Fifties, and the cab stopped in front of what had once, apparently, been a stable of the baser sort. Pete got out, and the driver, after an inward struggle, turned up his flag, so that the meter stopped clicking up dimes. To the discerning, little things like these tell much.

Inside the stable, which was full of cars, a small man in a check suit, with bright eyes, a vivid complexion and a gold tooth, greeted them.

"Hello, Bill!" he said to the driver. "How's every little thing by you?"

"Better," said Bill. "Moe, meet my friend. He might buy a boat if you've got one that can start round the block and get back here before midnight."

Promptly Moe's hands went into action. He had just the car—yes, yes! He led them to it. Bill gave it one look and Moe another.

"Listen," he said, "my friend's buying a car—see? He ain't starting a museum—see? Nor he ain't planning to keep a service station going all summer, either—see?"

Moe saw. He led the way, in silence, to another car. To Pete this was a less attractive machine than the first. Its paint was not so shiny; one fender was slightly crumpled. But Bill seemed to be better pleased. Pete, amazed and alarmed, saw him swing back one leg and deliver a mighty kick against a front wheel. Moe, however, made no protest.

Bill gave the speedometer, with its record of mileage, a perfunctory glance; then got down and examined, with meticulous care, the clutch, brake and gas pedals. Later he explained to Pete that while, when you were dealing with a gyp, nothing really meant anything, you could make a guess at the amount of driving a car had had by the condition of those pedals. Bill said that he himself knew seventeen ways of doctoring a speedometer's total mileage record, and he had never really studied the subject. Moe had.

After that the real examination began. Bill started the engine, ran it, throttled down, with a retarded spark; raced it; went over the pump and the hose connections; held a long conference with the carbureter; drained out a handful of gasoline from the vacuum tank, smelled it, and, Pete thought, tasted it. He did mysterious things in other parts of the car, emerging from their completion with greasy, oily hands.

Then he took the car out, invited Pete to get in the front seat with him, and departed, leaving Moe, wholly unconcerned, behind. He played around in heavy traffic; slipped into Central Park; drove uptown to find a hill. In the end he shook his head, plainly puzzled.

"Nothing much the matter with her that I can see," he said. "You'll have to spend a little money—get the valves ground and new rings. But she's worth it."

PETE maintained a respectful silence. He had not known that one went into so many things in a matter of this sort. He had driven a car, some years before, in the country. Now, after a front-seat trip with Bill, he wasn't so sure that the next day, say, would see him blithely driving through Columbus Circle. He went back, looking wise, to Moe's.

Moe, all smiles, greeted them. His eloquent hands expressed his admiration of the car, his confidence in Bill's verdict.

"I've driven worse," Bill admitted grudgingly. "How much?"

"Fifteen hundred dollars—cash," said Moe.

That seemed reasonable enough to Pete, who knew, within three or four hundred dollars, the list price of that particular machine when new.

"Listen," said Bill, reproachfully. "We just want to buy this bus, Moe—not all the rest of them you've got here."

Moe spoke rapidly and at great length. He wasn't, he explained, making a cent. Bill was his friend—hence the sum he had named. To any one else it would be, and so forth.

"Seven-fifty—take it or leave it," said Bill, interrupting.

Pete gasped. Moe was moved to tearful mirth. Much later Bill turned to Pete.

"Give him nine-seventy-five," he said. "You ain't being stung much at that—he always figured on getting nine-fifty for her."

Moe was distinctly uncertain about Pete's check. But the bank, upon telephonic conversation, proved reassuring. Tears were in his eyes still as he folded the slip of paper and put it away. He was losing money. Bill looked almost happy.

"I'll say he didn't put anything over this time!" he muttered. "You drive, bo?"

"I never have—in the city," said Pete. He had been growing more and more modest about his driving for the last hour.

"Don't start now, then," Bill advised. "Just as well turn her over to get fixed up a bit, anyway. And you can take some lessons in one of them school cars. They got rubber fenders on them, I guess."

Bill scouted around outside, found a friend, and commissioned him to drive Pete's car to a place where, he explained, they'd only charge him half as much again as the work to be done ought to cost, instead of twice as much, which, Bill said, was the usual custom.

"Gosh!" said Pete. "I—I'm much obliged, Bill. What do you get?"

Once more Bill had an inward struggle. And once more his better nature triumphed.

"I don't know what's got into me!" he said frankly. "You get me, though, somehow, boss. You don't owe me nothing. I get mine from Moe—see?"

"But—he lost money—"

"Say, don't make me laugh! Course, if you insist on slipping me something—I saved you some dough at that, I guess—"

"I'll tell the cock-eyed world you did!" said Pete, reaching for the roll of bills in his pocket. He counted off ten of them and gave them to Bill, and Bill kissed the topmost one.

"Boss," he said, earnestly, "you're there. Don't let any one tell you different. Where you goin' now? The clock ain't workin' for you—see? Who t'ell's the boss?"

"Why, home, I guess," said Pete. It was in the nature of an anticlimax, but that, he realized, was inevitable. You couldn't keep up the pace he had been traveling for the last few hours.

HOME was fun, at that. For the first time in several years Pete took out a certain bulging envelope marked, outside, "Bills Unpaid," with a smiling, even a grinning, countenance. A choice lot of bills. He regarded them with something of that mixture of emotions with which a man finds an old package of letters.

There were friendly, pleasant, unobtrusive bills. Bills that wanted to be paid, of course, some time, but wholly at his convenience—whenever he got around to it. Bills, these, from creditors who did business in old-fashioned buildings, and used engraved stationery. There were peremptory, unpleasant bills. Naturally, he wrote the checks for the nice bills first; one had to be fair in these matters.

Later it struck him that he was hungry, and he went over to the Brevoort, and sighed. Just a few years ago the evening would just have started with his arrival in the Brevoort. He would have found most of his friends in the downstairs rooms, and his news could—and would—have been celebrated appropriately. Now—well, the makeshifts made possible by bootleggers didn't appeal to him, and he didn't see a soul he knew, anyway, except some of the waiters.

So he went home early and planned to go to bed, but got an idea for a lay-out, instead, and worked half the night on it, and called Campbell up, in the morning, as soon as he had had a chance to get to his office, and told him about it, and got an order by telephone, without having to show his croquis, even, and went to work as if he still had only eleven dollars and sixty-three cents in the world; he had the stuff nearly finished by three o'clock that afternoon, when he suddenly remembered that he could go and paint sand dunes and invite Campbell and all other art editors to jump off the dock. Only, of course, he didn't want to paint, now, and he felt, practically for the first time in his life, like illustrating stories and doing advertising lay-outs.

He was, for fifteen minutes or so, seriously annoyed. He got out a half-finished landscape, and went to work at it, conscientiously, and ruined what might have been a good picture. And then, abruptly, he had a flash of inspiration. He had money enough to do as he jolly well pleased, didn't he? Well, what he jolly well pleased to do was what, for the last five years, he had loathed doing. So, joyfully, he chucked the smeared canvas across the room and went back to his lay-out, and when, the next day, he delivered it, Campbell liked it so much that he added a hundred dollars to the check.

"Stick around a few minutes and they'll have it for you, Pete," he said. This was equivalent to another hundred, really, because, as a rule, Campbell howled like a stricken wolf when Pete or any other artist asked, trembling, if he could have a check by that day week. "I'll put it through right away."

"Oh, never mind!" said Pete. "Let 'em mail it when they get around to it!"

He hadn't known it, but he had been living for years just for that opportunity. Campbell's face, as the words sank in, was beyond description. But he recovered himself as Pete was going out of the door.

"Oh, Pete!" he said. "Just a minute. That's good stuff. Listen—I can make them loosen up a bit if you keep up that gait. We'll call it six hundred for the next few jobs, and raise you again pretty soon."

"All right," said Pete indifferently, and went on his way.

Two art editors fairly forced stories upon him, later, when he called; one of them struck his fancy, and he went to work upon the pictures for it with enthusiasm. The result was that that particular magazine tried to put him under contract, and was appeased only by his reluctant agreement to illustrate a story a month for six months, at double his former price.

He was so busy for the next week that he never got a chance to go and get his car, much less take the driving lessons Bill had suggested. He didn't see anything of Elizabeth, either—and before the day of his inheritance he had fairly camped out on her doorstep. It wasn't that his feeling about Elizabeth had changed, or that he wasn't interested in his car, but he was simply too busy to do anything about them. If he had had time to give these matters thought they would, no doubt, have puzzled him greatly. But he had no spare time at all. His work took up the whole day and some of the night; he lunched, as a rule, on crackers and milk, and contrived an ingenious gag for his telephone, so that he didn't hear it when and if it rang.

INEVITABLY he suffered a reaction. He caught up with his work; for the moment all the editors and advertising agencies for whom and which he worked were appeased; the muffled telephone had kept others, who had heard that Pete Ashe had suddenly gone crazy and started turning out great stuff, from reaching him, and he hadn't had time to look at his mail for days. So, feeling vaguely discontented, as one does when one has nothing to do after being extremely busy, Pete sallied forth one day, and was hailed, a block from home, by Bill.

"Say—what's a matter?" Bill wanted to know. "How come you ain't been after your car? They done a sweet job on her—with me standing over them. I had her out yesterday—and, boy, I'll say that's some boat now!"

"Oh—the car! That's right!" said Pete. "I—I guess I sort of forgot. I've been pretty busy. Say—where do I go to take lessons?"

"Hop in," said Bill.

He took Pete uptown, to a school where driving is really taught. He superintended all the arrangements, and saw Pete start off at the wheel of an antique model of his own car, accompanied by a bored expert who had clutch and brake pedals on his side, duplicating those Pete had to manipulate.

Once Pete got over the notion that the money he had paid to the school represented the initiation fee of a suicide club, he enjoyed himself very much. There was something thrilling and exhilarating about driving through Columbus Circle; Pete didn't see why people paid money to ride on scenic railways and things at Coney Island when they could do that. He insisted upon taking a second lesson as soon as he had finished the first, and the next day he took two in the morning and one in the afternoon, after which the instructor said that while, of course, he was pretty rotten, he was as good as most drivers and might as well take his license test next morning. It was so ordered, and Pete passed triumphantly, which meant that he drove three blocks while the examiner exchanged stories with his instructor. Two days after that, with his license in his pocket, he went and got his car, and drove it downtown, bumping only one other car in the whole length of Fifth Avenue.

Then he met Elizabeth.

Now Elizabeth, as Pete saw her, was the most beautiful, the most gracious, the wisest, and altogether the most desirable young woman in America. He had known her very well for a long time, and he knew he was in love with her—he had other reasons, but this was convincing—because he hadn't taken the slightest interest in any other girl since he had known her. Elizabeth had told him a number of times—this was before she announced her engagement to Denniston—that he wasn't in love with her at all, because, if he were, he would take steps to put himself in a position to enter into matrimony. But that had only amused him. His reply had always been that if she would marry him he would take care of things all right, because he always had made as much money as he needed—and no more.

Discounting Pete's enthusiasm, still you would have had to admit that Elizabeth—Elizabeth Wayne, she was, in full—was an extremely good-looking girl. She was fairly tall, which brought her about up to Pete's shoulder, Pete being so big that one turned in the street to look at him. She wore her hair short, but spent more time and trouble on it than most girls have to on long hair, and she dressed in a fashion that made assistant buyers come forward to see that she was waited on properly when she went into shops—which, you may be assured, means a good deal.

She wasn't the paragon Pete thought she was, by any means, of course. She wasn't beautiful, and he'd have known that had she been any one but Elizabeth; she was just a pretty girl who knew how to look just a little better than Nature had intended that she should. She had a tricky, hair-trigger sort of temper, and an obstinate streak that made it practically impossible for her ever to admit that she was in the wrong, although she usually knew very well when she was.

ELIZABETH had come to New York from up the state a few years before, when she was very young indeed, and had done extremely well. She had come as an art student, with vague ideas of a career, and had compromised, after variegated jobs, by becoming a well paid and extremely able copy-writer in a big advertising agency. She was freer than most women who work, because she did much of her work at home, being something of a specialist; and she had a comfortable apartment in a side street near Fifth Avenue, above Washington Square, and a maid, and could and did ask people to charming dinners, and generally lived a sane and comfortable life. And she hated it, and her job, and herself, and New York. Moreover, she knew exactly why she hated them all, and hated herself just a little more because she did know. That was why, really, she was engaged to Denniston.

She wasn't in the least in love with him, although she would have annihilated any one who said so. She couldn't have been! Denniston was a tall, earnest, fearfully respectable person, who wore glasses with big shell rims, and lived far uptown with his people—a mother and an elderly sister—and was rather vaguely engaged in the rehabilitation of a business that his ancestors had conducted for a hundred years and misconducted for the last twenty.

Denniston's marriage to Elizabeth was something vaguely set for a vague future time when he should have put the business on its feet and restored the family income to its pre-war glory. They had become engaged with some such understanding, and he called on her two or three times a week, and took her to dinner and the theater, occasionally, and sent her flowers and candy—she hated cut flowers and never ate candy—and an assortment, from time to time, of new books, obviously chosen by one of the newer office boys at his bookseller's.

Pete didn't know all these things about Elizabeth's engagement, of course, and about Elizabeth's fiancé, but he did know enough to feel that it was a queer show. Denniston fairly appalled him—as he did Denniston, for that matter. Denniston had a mysterious effect on Pete—he turned him into something not at all like himself. Not that they met often. Neither of them craved the other's society, and Elizabeth, after one or two experiences, was prepared to go to almost any length to keep them apart.

Well, anyway, Pete met Elizabeth. He had just brought the car to a triumphant stop outside his own door, and was sitting at the wheel, relaxing. One forgets that sensation after one has driven for a little while, but every one knows it at some time. Pete was relaxing gradually: first his feet; then his legs; then his hands. The process hadn't reached head or brain when Elizabeth came swinging along and stopped, amazed, to stare at him.

"PETE ASHE!" she said. "What on earth! And where have you been? I've telephoned to you nine times and written you two notes!"

If she hadn't been so surprised and taken aback she would never, of course, have spoken of the telephone calls. Pete was appalled, although he looked utterly indifferent. That was because his brain was still threading Fifth Avenue traffic.

"I've been frightfully busy," he said.

There are ways and ways of uttering a phrase like that. Pete's way, just then, made every word a barbed dart.

"Whose car is that?" asked Elizabeth.

"Mine. I bought it. For nine hundred and seventy-five dollars."

"What's the matter with it?" Elizabeth knew a good deal about cars.

"Not a thing. I had the engine overhauled—new rings—had the bearings taken up—valves ground. She runs like a new car. Come on."

As one hypnotized, Elizabeth came on. She slipped into the seat beside Pete; the car was a roadster, with a rumble seat behind. Pete stepped on the starter; went into speed, let in the clutch, and backed neatly into an ice peddler's cart. Elizabeth shrieked faintly; Pete, however, was totally unconcerned. He stopped; shifted, and moved forward.

"Last car I drove had a different gear shift," he explained. "Going anywhere in particular?"

"Just home," she said. "Why don't you come and have some tea, Pete? I rather miss you when you're not around."

So he drove her home, and went in, and she made tea, because it was the maid's day out. And in due time Elizabeth exploded.

"What's it all about?" she cried. "Pete, are you deliberately trying to drive me mad?"

"Why, of course not, Elizabeth," he said mildly. "What's what all about?"

"You—the car—everything! How did you get money enough to buy it? Go on. Tell me—"

"Oh!" he said. "That's right—I haven't seen you since it happened, have I? Why, you know, my uncle George— Did I ever tell you about my uncle George?"

"You did not! I didn't even know you had one!"

"Well, I didn't know it myself, all the time. Anyway, he kicked off, about a year ago, and didn't leave a will, and I was one of the heirs, and they sent the money on one day, and I wanted to go down on Long Island and paint sand dunes, so I bought the car."

"So that's where you've been!" She sighed—perhaps in relief. "Was it a lot of money, Pete? You didn't blow it all in on the car, did you?"

"Oh, Lord, no!" He made a wide, expansive gesture. "It's quite a lot." He became himself, for the first time since they had met—being now fully relaxed. "Oh,

A low hail came to them across the water. "Dick—oh, Dick!" "Holy mother! The lad we crowned!" said Bill. He raised his voice. "Hello!"

Elizabeth! I don't owe a cent any more. I—" He stopped, appalled. "Oh, Lord! I wrote out all those checks—and I didn't have any envelopes—and I haven't got them yet!"

Here was the Pete Elizabeth knew and understood. She laughed.

"Never mind, Pete!" she said. "They'll be glad enough to get the checks when you do remember. How did the painting go?"

"The painting?" He frowned. "Oh, I haven't had time to start yet. Been too busy."

"Busy?"

He explained about the lay-out for Campbell, and the insistence of the other art editors and advertising agencies, and Elizabeth's reason tottered once more upon its throne. She had been trying for three years, aided by his practically continuous insolvency, to make him work one-half as hard as in the last two weeks, with all obvious reasons for working eliminated, he had done of his own free will! Now that he didn't need any money he had, Elizabeth gathered from her knowledge of his affairs, which was full, made about as much since his inheritance had come as he had ever made before in three months.

Fortunately Denniston came in just then. She would probably have laid violent hands on Pete within two minutes.

FOR once, Denniston's presence didn't affect Pete at all. He nodded to him.

"Hello, Denny," he said. "How's everything?"

Elizabeth nodded, too. She and Denniston never indulged in any display of sentiment before a third person; their kisses, if any, were reserved for moments of privacy.

"I'm very well, thanks," said Denniston. "How are you, Ashe?"

Pete took the question seriously, and gave it some thought.

"Why, I'm all right, I guess," he said. "I drank too much Brevoort coffee the other night, and it kept me awake, though. At least—do you suppose the Brevoort coffee *could* keep any one awake? I always supposed it was the caffein did that, and you only get that in real coffee, don't you? Maybe it's like cigarettes, though: they say it's the paper that hurts you, not the tobacco. Maybe it's the china at the Brevoort—"

"Idiot!" said Elizabeth, and grinned.

Denniston just looked puzzled. Elizabeth said something very quickly, so that Denniston couldn't ask how the china could have anything to do with it.

"Well, anyway, I'm all right," said Pete persistently. "Thanks very much for asking, Denny."

"That's quite all ri—" Denniston began, and then caught himself, and bit his lip, and turned pink, and bristled.

"Pete's just trying to be funny—don't notice him," said Elizabeth. "He's got an excuse, too—he's come into a fortune and bought a car."

"Ah!" said Denniston. "Congratulations, Ashe!"

You know how some people can congratulate a girl when she announces her engagement—so that she wants, first, to slay them, and, next, to engage detectives and set them to work upon her young man's past?

"Thanks," said Pete morosely. Then he brightened. "I say, Bet, about that painting—I'm free now, for a while. I was thinking of running down on Long Island tomorrow and making some notes. Why don't you come along? The trip would do you good."

"Tomorrow—Saturday—I don't see why I couldn't," said Elizabeth.

Denniston cleared his throat, and she looked at him. So did Pete—and was inspired.

"You come on, too," he said cordially. "Lots of room. Do you good, too. Do us all good."

"Done!" said Elizabeth. "You can get away, can't you, Denny?" Denniston's only other name was Alexander, and she absolutely refused to call him that, while Alec and Sandy were both out of the question.

"I—why—er—I—" Denniston was neatly trapped, and knew it. Elizabeth was going, whether he did or not; so much was plain. "Why—yes—I can, I think," he said.

"That's fine! Let's get away early—I'd like to go clear to Montauk! I'll drive part of the way, Pete, so you won't get too tired. Let's meet right here at—oh, get here about half-past seven, Pete, and I'll give you breakfast and some decent coffee, for once in your life. Denny—don't you be a minute later than eight getting here."

THE breakfast was all that Elizabeth had promised. She got it herself, because her maid never arrived before eight, and seldom before half-past, and Pete sat down to homemade muffins and real coffee and sausages. It was a little late in the year for those, but Elizabeth explained that they had to have them, because there were griddle cakes, too, with real maple syrup. They weren't anywhere near through when Denniston arrived, on the stroke of eight; and his expression when he found that the maid had not yet come repaid Pete for much suffering in the past. Elizabeth's lips tightened for a moment when she saw it; had Pete caused them to do that he would, about one second later, have been in serious trouble. But she never was angry with Denniston—vocally, at least.

They were ready finally, and went out. Pete opened up the rumble seat. Denniston surveyed it with what was plainly a sinking heart. Denniston had long legs; nearly as long as Pete's. Pete was going to drive; obviously, Elizabeth, being a girl, must have the other half of the front seat, which was, emphatically, not roomy enough for three.

"You climb over the wheel, somehow—there's a sort of step," said Pete. "You can make room, I guess; I stowed some stuff for lunch, in case we got caught—sandwiches and fruit and stuff in thermos bottles. And my painting kit's there—don't tear the canvas—"

Denniston thought dark and somber things, and somehow got in. Pete was in golf clothes and knickerbockers; Elizabeth wore feminine equivalents of such things; Denniston, clinging to the derby hat he always wore, and the sort of suit that went with his office, looked rather out of place. That was why, perhaps, Elizabeth turned, as she settled into place, and patted his hand. Pete saw that, and was distinctly less pleased about the rumble seat than he had been.

In the next half-hour, though, while he was discovering that traffic along Fifth Avenue and traffic in Brooklyn, beyond the Manhattan Bridge, have about the same relation to one another as a straight piece of string and the same piece of string after an industrious baby has stopped playing with it, Pete's mind was upon other things. He evolved an idea during his voyage of exploration: the faster you went, the sooner you got out where life was again a simple thing. In fact, as he went along, Pete grew more and more convinced that his new car ran better at high speed—which was, in fact, true.

Elizabeth was distinctly impressed. It hadn't ever occurred to her that Pete would be the sort of driver he showed himself to be when they reached the Merrick Road. Denniston tried, once or twice, to engage her in conversation, but she abolished him.

"Don't distract me!" she said. "Eas-y, Pete! There's a cop, just coming out of that side road we passed—"

Babylon, Moriches, Quogue, the Hamptons—town after town was set behind them. The salt smell of the sea was in the wind that beat against their faces—especially against Denniston's face. Above them white clouds wandered in a sea of blue. Beyond Amagansett they really saw the ocean at last, and the dunes that Pete had longed for, as they straightened out for the last few miles of rough going that lay between them and land's end at Montauk Point.

" 'Promised Land'—I love the very names down here!" Elizabeth cried. She turned to Denniston; they were past all need of looking for motorcycles now. "You must know all this by heart, Denny! You come down here a lot in the summer, don't you?"

"I've never been this far," said Denniston.

"My soul!" said Elizabeth.

She looked about her. She could see the surf pounding, as gaps in the dunes showed the white line of the breakers, and beyond it the green of broken water, melting into the distant blue. She could see gulls, circling high above them. She could look off across a waste of sand, molded by the winds, with scrub oak rising behind it, and upon a glory of wild azalea in full bloom. She could see—and, seeing, sigh for memory's sake—the color of the sand, the marvelous, ever shifting tints of what, to Denny, was just brown sand.

Pete, beside her, was fairly drunk already. He was driving with one hand most of the time, using the other to attract her attention, and point to some new marvel that he had seen first.

"Look!" he would cry, again and again. "Oh, Bet—look!"

"Stop, if you want to, Pete," she said. "If you see anything you want to sketch—"

"Oh, no!" he cried. "I want to go clear to the end first—just as far as we can—until we'd go into the sea if we went any farther! Don't you? Oh, Bet—to stand where the next thing you'd see would be Europe if only you could see it at all!"

"I know!" she cried. "Pete—I'm mad about this! I've never been so thrilled in my life! Why don't people who have cars think of trips like this? They don't, though! They take you to Longue Vue for dinner, or around the Ashokan Reservoir!"

SO THEY went on, past the little cluster of houses where the road goes off to the old fishing village of Montauk, on the Sound side, where the railway ends, and on, up among the real sand hills. Ever narrower and narrower grew the road, and rougher, too, so that even Pete, sometimes, was a little sorry for Denniston. They saw the houses, right out on the ocean bluff, that the members of the Montauk Association built, years ago, and wondered at them.

And then suddenly, as the road wandered back nearer to the ocean again, Elizabeth caught her breath, and her hand clutched Pete's shoulder.

"Oh, Pete! Stop—just a minute!" she said. "Look at that house!"

Before them a house grew up out of the sand. All white stucco it was, trimmed with blue and weathered to a strange, strange tint by storm and blowing sand.

"It's mine!" said Elizabeth. Her voice had a singing quality; she spoke in a sort of chant. "Mine—mine—mine! Look, Pete—look at those windows! And that chimney! Can't you imagine the fireplace there is—and the big room—with windows looking out on the whole Atlantic Ocean? You'd go down on the beach, you know, and pick up driftwood; it burns green and red and yellow and blue—like magic flames—not like a fire at all!"

Abruptly she remembered Denniston.

"Look, Denny!" she said. "Isn't it perfect? I want it! I want to buy it! And—" Her voice rose to a sort of shriek. "Look! That sign! It says—it does—it's for sale! Denny!"

"By Jove! There is a sign!" said Pete. "Let's get out—"

She shook her head. "No. Not now. Let's go on, now. We'll stop on the way back."

So Pete drove on until a lighthouse showed at last ahead, and they knew they had come to Montauk Point itself. He drove on, off the road, up a grassy slope, and stopped, hard by the light, a hundred feet from the edge of the cliff. The sound of the surf was in their ears; the wind swept clean and fresh across the hill where they were.

For a moment no one said anything. Then Denniston spoke, in accents of stern disapproval.

"Well!" he said. "Now that we're here there isn't much to see!"

Pete and Elizabeth ignored that unanimously, without even an ocular consultation. They reflected, perhaps, that some allowance ought to be made for a man who has just completed one hundred and thirty miles in a rumble seat, and knows he is going to have to ride a hundred and thirty miles more in the same fashion. Also, they were busy, seeing all the things Denniston didn't think worth seeing.

A black dog, related in a way, perhaps, not to be dwelt upon too closely, to a setter, came up, to look into the matter of making friends. Sundry tame ducks, led by a veteran deceiver—it was Pete who guessed that they were decoys—waddled up, in a long ine, hoping for largesse in the way of food. Some distance off horses grazed at their own will, with tiny foals running beside three of the mares.

Elizabeth got out, and went to the very edge of the cliff, and looked down, and then drew back, frightened. And Pete got out, too, and wandered about, and grew drunker than ever.

"I didn't think it would be like this," he kept saying. "I didn't dare to hope so! Did you, Bet?"

"I didn't think at all," she said. "I haven't got a mind any more, anyway. Just feelings. Pete! Did you notice the place just back there? The two funny little buildings? One of them's a place to eat. They—they ought to have lobsters, don't you think?"

"I'll go and see," he said. And he came back beaming.

"Lobsters and fish and fried potatoes and coffee," he reported. "There's a man with a voice like a Welsh evangelist I heard once—no, like Eliza's father in Shaw's 'Pygmalion'—remember?"

"I NEVER eat lobster," said Denniston. "You shouldn't, either, Elizabeth. It's extremely indigestible."

"Stuff!" said Elizabeth. "How many did you order, Pete?"

"Three. Denny can eat some of the sandwiches. They have oilcloth on the tables. And he says the other shack's a bungalow, and people can stay all night."

"Heavenly! But I'm going to have that house, so I don't care. Denny, how much do you suppose that place would cost?"

"I haven't the least idea, Elizabeth. But it would be a very unwise purchase. The resale value would be extremely uncertain, and no one lives down here."

"That's why I love it," she said. "How soon will they be ready for us, Pete?"

"Half an hour. Let's go for a walk."

"Of course! Come on, Denny."

But he wouldn't. Again, they were able to make allowances, and to believe that Denny might well feel that he had had a good deal of exercise already. So they followed what looked like a road across the sand hills, and went down into a depression where the horses were grazing by a sort of pond, seemingly of fresh water. Every so often they found themselves walking on fish-nets, and decided that they had been put down to give automobile wheels something to grip. Though why in the world any one should drive even a Ford over such a road was beyond them.

"Lord! Can't you imagine the old pirates burying their treasure here, Bet?" Pete said. "Where shall we start digging?"

"Nowhere—now. We'll come back on a moonlit night, and find a tree that casts a shadow—we may have to plant it! And we'll walk thirty paces along the line of the shadow just at midnight and mark a cross in the sand, and dig—"

"We won't bring Denny," said Pete. "Somehow—I don't think he'd enjoy it."

"No," said Elizabeth, "he wouldn't. So he might. Let's go back."

They ate Denny's lobster as well as their own, and all the fried potatoes, and a great deal of fish, and drank two whole pots of coffee, and staggered out, ultimately, convinced that they had eaten far too much, and glad of it. The dog decided not to go with them, although Pete said Denny could easily make room for him; but he invited them to come again.

"Now we'll go and look at my house!" said Elizabeth.

The house looked even more wonderful when they got out of the car and walked right up to it. It was low and rambling; it hugged the ground. It challenged the gales that must sweep upon it from the ocean; it stood four square to all the winds, to sky and sea. Just there the cliff dipped low, so that from the bluff on which the house stood to the beach was no great journey. And there had been a cunning choice of ground for the building of this house.

It looked down upon a little cove, made by two minor, rocky headlands that jutted out into the sea a hundred yards on either side of it. At Montauk Point itself, three miles away, perhaps, there was no beach at all, really; the sea came up and broke upon the rocks. But here there was a stretch of two hundred yards of white sand, clean and beautiful.

"Oh, I love it!" cried Elizabeth. "I love it more every minute. Look! We can see inside, through the windows. Isn't that living-room perfect, Denny?"

"It's a fine room," he said. "It's a big house to have built out here."

"Electric light!" said Pete, and whistled. "Must be a plant in the place somewhere."

"There's a garage—and there's oceans of room," said Elizabeth. "What house parties one could have here!"

"Too bad we can't get in," said Pete. "Where's that sign?"

He found it, and shouted to Elizabeth.

"The agent's at Amagansett," he said. "That's not so far—we can get there and back in an hour and a half or less. Come on—let's get the keys."

"Oh, can we? I'd love to!"

So they went back to Amagansett and hunted around for J. Morgan, the agent, who wasn't in his office, of course, but was found presently in what was Amagansett's principal and only restaurant, billiard and pool parlor and news depot, according to your needs. Informed of what they wanted, he scratched his head.

"OH, THE Crocker place!" he said finally. He felt, plainly, that he had done a first-rate piece of detective work in identifying the place they meant. There were, to be sure, only five places on that road, and only one of them was for sale, but J. Morgan was well pleased with himself, none the less. "Yeh—I'm agent for that."

"We want to see it, please," said Elizabeth.

"Why, sure, miss," said Morgan. "When will you be coming down again?"

"Again? Why, we're here now! We want to see it now—today. You've got the keys, haven't you? It says you have, on the sign."

"Yeh—that's so—it does. Yeh. I've got the keys, all right." He scratched his head again. "I'm not sure that Mr. Crocker really wants to sell, though. There's been some talk of his changing his mind and keeping that place."

"How much does he want for it?" asked Denny.

"Well, now, I'd have to look that up," answered Morgan. "I'm not rightly sure. Seems to me he was asking forty thousand."

Denny laughed. It wasn't a nice laugh, and it didn't go at all with Elizabeth's shocked and woebegone look. Pete heard the laugh, and he saw Elizabeth's face, and the way the corners of her mouth were drooping. He'd never seen her look like that; he hadn't known she could look like that. Like a little girl who has heard something that hurts her. . . .

"Forty thousand, eh?" said Pete, in the best imitation he could manage, without rehearsal, of the way he had heard business men talk. "Well, I'd want to look into it, of course, and see the place. And we haven't much time. Can you let me have the keys, or do you want to come back with us? We've got room for you."

Denny winced, but Morgan looked at the rumble seat, and decided to use his own car. Something about Pete's voice and manner had scattered his doubts; he went, quite meekly, and without further discussion, to get the keys and his car. So in a few minutes they headed east from Amagansett again. Denny groaned, but made no other comment.

The inside of the house was more wonderful than the outside. Elizabeth went and stood up inside the great fireplace of the living-room, and then curled up like a cat on a great window seat, and looked out at the ocean and fairly purred. Denny sat down in a big armchair—there was a lot of furniture about—and refused to move, but Pete and Elizabeth went upstairs.

"Pete, it's wonderful!" said Elizabeth. "I never dreamed any one would build such a house out here. It must have cost a fortune—I suppose forty thousand really isn't so bad! A tiled bathroom—and there's heat—see? One could come out here in the winter. Imagine watching a winter gale from that big window downstairs!"

"It must sound like a Wagner opera when the wind really gets going!" said Pete. "I bet it howls down that chimney!"

Elizabeth sighed. "Denny's right, of course," she said. "It's not for the likes of us, Pete! But I'm glad we've seen it. Where's that man? He'll be wild when he finds out we didn't mean to buy—"

"He's hanging around outside, somewhere," said Pete. "Bet, doesn't he seem queer to you?"

"No. Why?" She laughed. "You never lived in a small town up the state, Pete! He's perfectly normal."

"Maybe. But there's something else, Bet. People have been around here, lately. I saw a lot of marks in the sand, where it was sheltered—as if a lot of people had been walking around."

"Well, we're not the only people who pass here—and I should think any one who saw this place would want to come and look at it close to."

"Oh!" said Pete, rather flatly. "That's so, too. I hadn't thought of that. Wonder if they throw in the furniture with the house for the forty thousand?"

"Not a chance! It's good, too, Pete—did you notice those beds? It all suits the house perfectly. I'd like to know why Mr. Crocker even thinks of selling the place. If I owned it!"

RELUCTANTLY, at last, she turned toward the stairs. The cellar door was locked, she found, when she started down; Morgan didn't have a key.

"Nothing to see down there, anyway," he said. "Just the heating plant—burns fuel oil. It's a good big cellar, though—under the whole house."

"Fuel oil, eh?" said Pete, looking wise. "That's better than coal."

"Spent a heap of money on this place, Crocker did," said Morgan. "More'n he'll ever get back. I wouldn't have it for a gift, myself."

"You're not much of a salesman for it!" said Pete.

Morgan shrugged. "What's the good? It's a white elephant, if I ever saw one."

"I love elephants," said Elizabeth. "Denny, I suppose—"

He stared at her.

"We've always talked about having a place somewhere down on Long Island—on the ocean," she said. "But—"

Denny looked patient. "My dear Elizabeth," he said, "even if I could afford it, I shouldn't think of buying this place. I've been looking about—I found a house last summer, at Easthampton, that I shall show you later, when we come down alone. As for this, it's out of the question."

Something stirred in Pete. "I'll buy the place," he said, turning to Morgan, who just stood staring at him, his jaw fallen.

"Pete!" cried Elizabeth.

Denny said nothing. He couldn't. Pete produced a check book and his fountain pen.

"Come on—let's get at it!" he said.

"But—" That was from Morgan. And Denny: "My dear Ashe, you don't buy property out of hand that way! The title has to be searched; there are all sorts of formalities—preliminaries—"

"Hanged if I see why!" said Pete. "I like the house—I think it's cheap. Why can't I give him a check and settle things right now?"

"I—I have to consult the owner," said Morgan, recovering himself a little. "It's the way this gentleman says—you can't buy a house the way you do a pound of coffee."

"Well, get busy and consult him, then," said Pete. "Let's go back to Amagansett and telephone him right away."

"I'm not sure he wants to sell," said Morgan. "And I don't advise you to buy. Now, I can sell you a lot and fix it so you can build and save money over buying this house—get you good terms, too. Let me show you some of the other land around here."

"Seen it all," said Pete. "This is the place I want. And I'm going to have it. You can't put up signs all over a place and then renege when some one comes along to buy. I bet there's a law against that."

"I've got to consult the owner," Morgan repeated doggedly. "You let me have your name and address, and I'll write to you."

They went out then, and back to the cars. Denniston, plainly overcome, still, by Pete's lunacy, decided to ride back with Morgan as far as Amagansett. Elizabeth turned to Pete, her eyes shining, when they were alone.

"Pete, you *are* crazy!" she said. "Why on earth should you buy that house? What will you do with it?"

"Give it to you," Pete said promptly. "Wedding present."

"Pete, you can't do a thing like that! Denny wouldn't let me take it—"

"You don't have to marry Denny. Marry some one who wouldn't mind."

"YOU'RE absolutely impossible, Pete! Can't you understand that I'm engaged to Denny?"

"Sure. I understand that, all right. But if I want to buy that house Morgan can't stop me, and Denny can't stop me, and you can't."

"I never saw anything change any one like getting that money has changed you, Pete Ashe!"

"'Like' isn't a conjunction, Bet," he said. "You want to watch things like that, as long as you keep on writing for a living."

He turned to look back at the house. And suddenly he threw on the brakes, so that they came to a grinding, swerving stop.

"What's the matter?"

He didn't answer for a moment, but continued to stare at the house.

"That's queer," he said, frowning. "I looked back—and there was some one looking out of one of the upstairs windows—a man. Looking after us. There wasn't a soul in the house when we were in it—and Morgan locked all the doors."

"Sure you saw some one?"

"Absolutely—couldn't mistake it. He ducked when I stopped, and he saw me looking back. But I saw him, right enough. Queer—must have been down cellar. That door must have been locked from the other side."

"It is queer—if you really saw some one," said she. "But, Pete, we didn't hear a sound downstairs—"

"I thought I did," Pete confessed. "I didn't say anything about it, but it was as if some one had knocked something over."

"Let's go on," she said, shivering a little. "If there's any one spying on us we don't want them to know we're suspicious—"

"That's right." Pete drove on.

At Amagansett, in Morgan's shop, it became obvious that Denny had been getting in a few remarks calculated to enlighten the real-estate man as to Pete. Morgan treated Pete as one treats a spoiled child; he humored him; pretended to take it for granted that the deal was going through. While they were talking Denny took Elizabeth aside, and Pete, observing her flushed cheeks, and catching the tone, though not the drift, of her replies to Denny, grinned to himself.

The matter of the house seemed to him to be simple. Elizabeth wanted it. Therefore, she ought to have it. Moreover, he didn't like having people act as Morgan and Denny were acting. If Morgan didn't want him to buy the place, there was something queer that required an explanation. Also, if Morgan didn't want him to buy it, that looked like a pretty good reason for doing so. He didn't like the man. There was something fishy about him. And he had most certainly seen some one looking out of an upstairs window.

Crocker, it seemed, was not to be reached by telephone.

"All right—I'll get after him, in New York," said Pete.

But that didn't please Morgan at all. Negotiations had been begun with and through him; they must be completed in the same way. It was most irregular to think, even, of seeing Mr. Crocker. Pete didn't argue the point; Elizabeth looked a little surprised at his swift subsidence before Morgan's shocked protest.

"Mr. Ashe is not a business man," Denniston explained, charitably. "He is an artist, and doesn't understand how things like this have to be done."

"I guess that's so," said Pete. "I'm pretty crude. When I want to get something done I usually just do it. That's all wrong, isn't it?"

WHEN they were in the car again—with Denny still in the rumble seat—Elizabeth tried to cheer Pete.

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter," she said. "It isn't as if you were really going to buy the house."

"To which the answer is yes and no—as usual," said Pete. "Yes, it doesn't matter, and no, I am going to buy the house. From John Livingston Crocker, of 246 Wall Street and East Eighty-seventh Street. Telephones, Hanover 4444 and Lenox 8888. Nice easy numbers to remember, aren't they?"

Elizabeth regarded him with a wholly new respect.

"Now, how on earth—" she said.

"Acted dishonorably," admitted Pete. "Looked at a letter from Crocker on Morgan's desk. Read it while he was talking—that was why I didn't answer back. Bet, I don't like this man Morgan. I don't trust him. He'd rob the baby's bank and fill it with pebbles. Crocker's letter gave him particular beans for not selling the house—and especially for letting a man who was all set to buy it get away, last week. Me, I'm going to see Crocker. I think we are two hearts with but a single beat."

Elizabeth frowned. "I wonder if there *is* something queer about that house?" she said. "I'm beginning to feel spooky about it. Are you sure some one was at that window, Pete?"

"Sure," he said. "Never mind, Bet. We're going to find out what's what, all right."

Denny caught cold on the way home, and sneezed all the way from Jamaica to the Queensboro Bridge. So they took him home, and turned him over to his mother and sister. Elizabeth said, without much show of real feeling, that they would soak his feet in a mustard bath, put him to bed, and give him castor oil. Pete looked shocked.

"I know," said Elizabeth. "That's just the way I feel about it, too, Pete. But they *will* tell me all about it. People like Denny's mother and sister never do apply the same standards to their own conversation that they do to literature and the stage."

"Well, let's eat, first, and then go see Crocker," said Pete. "Want to come along when I see him?"

"You bet! Let's both go home and change our clothes first, though. We might go and dance, later. We haven't danced for ages."

"Amendment carried," said Pete.

They ate a meal of which Denny would certainly have disapproved, and enjoyed it very much. Then they drove uptown to see Mr. Crocker. He was plainly surprised to see them, but extremely pleasant—especially when he found out Pete's object.

"So you want to buy the house, eh?" he said. "Well—you could do worse. I bought it for my daughter. And now she's married an Englishman. So I've no use for it. Land values down there are absurdly high—but all the land is held by people with money enough to keep them up. So it seems likely they'll stay about as they are."

"You want forty thousand?" said Pete.

Crocker nodded. "Yes," he said. "That sees me clear—just about. You've been through the house?"

"Oh, yes!" said Elizabeth.

CROCKER beamed. He seemed to approve of Elizabeth—and she did look particularly nice, that evening.

"I assume—it is possible, perhaps, that you contemplate—that the house might be used for a honeymoon? I can imagine no more—"

Elizabeth didn't exactly blush, because she wasn't the blushing kind, but she came close to it.

"We—we're not engaged—"

"Yet," said Pete, with firmness.

"Mr. Ashe and I are just friends," said Elizabeth coldly, with restored morale.

"I see—I beg your pardon," said Crocker, pulling at his white mustache. He seemed to like Pete, too. "The mistake was, though, I think, pardonable."

"Absolutely," said Pete. "How about the furniture, Mr. Crocker? That doesn't go with the house?"

"No—no," said Crocker. "You see—that is pretty valuable. If you happen to know anything about early American colonial—"

"I do," said Elizabeth. "I didn't examine it carefully, of course, but it looked wonderful. If those are all old pieces—"

"I have some reason to believe that they are," said Mr. Crocker dryly. "My daughter's fad that year happened to be furniture. If you want the things, we might call it forty-five thousand—the place as it stands."

"All right," said Pete. Once more he produced check book and fountain pen. But even Mr. Crocker was moved to mirth by this.

"My dear sir!" he said. "We can't be quite so precipitate as that! There are formalities: a search of the title—although I can give you a guaranteed title, as it happens. But your lawyer must approve the transaction—"

"I haven't any lawyer," said Pete, doggedly. "And I want to buy the place—now—tonight. I want to walk out of here knowing that the deal is closed."

Crocker smiled. Then he laughed again.

"If you will excuse me a moment?" he said. "I have a friend here who may be able to help us."

"Pete," said Elizabeth, when he had gone, "don't be so reckless—so impulsive! That's an awful lot of money—I don't care how much you have! And—if you're doing it just because I love the place—you—you mustn't—"

Pete just looked at her. And she couldn't say anything more, because Mr. Crocker reappeared, accompanied this time by another man, who also had a white mustache. Elizabeth was distinctly impressed; Sherill Warner was very close to being the undisputed leader of the New York bar. The case was stated to him.

"Well, we ought to be able to manage that," he said. "I'll draw up a contract of sale—Mr. Ashe will give you his check. On Monday you will execute a deed, and he will formally take title. But we can make the sale binding at once."

Paper and pen were brought; Warner sat down and wrote for a few minutes. Mr. Crocker and Pete signed the paper he gave them; Pete wrote out his check; Warner and Elizabeth witnessed the signatures.

"Is that all?" asked Pete, and drew a long breath. "The house is mine, now? I can sell it—or give it away?"

Warner smiled. "I shouldn't advise you to give it away," he said. "Better sell it—

for one dollar, say, and other good and valuable considerations. Gifts of real estate have kept a number of deserving lawyers busy in the past—and will in the future."

"I see. Thanks," said Pete. "But it's all settled?"

"Yes," said Crocker. "If you can drop around to my office on Monday—say about three o'clock—I'll have the rest of the papers ready."

"Simple enough!" said Pete. That was when they were in the street again. He looked at his watch. "Lord—nearly one o'clock! We won't get in many dances, Bet—"

She shrieked, feebly.

"Dances!" she cried. "Pete, I'm so tired you'll have to carry me upstairs! I didn't realize it until just now! I suppose I was excited, before. It must have been ten o'clock when we had dinner!"

"Good thing we didn't know it—we mightn't have had the nerve to go and see the old boy," said Pete. "All right—I'll take you home. I say, Bet—let's go down and look the place over again pretty soon. Shall we?"

"Of course," she said. "Take me home now, though, Pete—I'm dead."

PETE was tired himself, for that matter, when he came to think of it. It had been a crowded day. He attributed a good deal of his weariness, though, to the presence of Denny. He had never spent so many successive hours in Denny's company, and it seemed to him singularly difficult to imagine doing so again, voluntarily. He regarded Elizabeth curiously as he said good night to her; he wondered if she had ever seen quite so much of Denny before. On the whole, he thought, concentrated doses of Denny ought to be good for her, heroic though the remedy was.

He put up his car, and walked home, practically asleep. He felt in his letter-box mechanically, but he was much too tired to open any of the letters it contained. He dropped them all on his desk, and concentrated on keeping awake long enough to get undressed. Then his eyes fell on a piece of paper that lay on top of the pile of letters. Necessarily, he read what was written, or, rather, printed upon it. His eyes grew wide. His sleepiness fell away. For he read:

"If you know what's good for you you won't buy that house at Montauk."

"I—will—be—damned!" said Pete. He was still in the argumentative mood that sleepiness produces. "But I have bought it!" he insisted.

The telephone rang. Pete answered it.

"Mr. Ashe?" It was a crisp, noncommittal voice; the sort of voice most business men try to cultivate. "Mr. Ashe, I am speaking in your own interest. I advise and urge you very earnestly to go no further in any contemplated purchase of Mr. John L. Crocker's property near Montauk Point."

"Why—who the devil are you?" Pete asked. Amazement was giving way to anger.

"I am afraid I cannot answer that question," said the voice. "I assure you, however, that I know whereof I speak. You will be well advised to abandon any idea of purchasing that property at this time."

"But—look here—damn it—I've bought it already!"

The voice betrayed its owner's surprise and concern.

"Impossible!" it said. "There hasn't been time—you were in Amagansett this afternoon—"

"Yes—and I was in Mr. Crocker's library, writing him a check, tonight! Put that in your pipe and smoke it! Look here—who the devil *are* you? Are you the sneaking, slab-sided, cock-eyed hyena that was snooping around down cellar this afternoon?"

Click! Frantically Pete jiggled his receiver up and down. There was a buzz in his ear; the sound of distant waters; a hum of many voices; finally: "Number, please?"

"I don't want any number!" he yelled. "I want to know who called me up just now!"

"Do you know the number of the telephone they were calling from?"

"Of course I don't! If I did why should I ask you?"

"I'm sorry, sir. No record is kept of incoming calls. I'll give you the manager's office." Click. Buzzzzz. Buzzz.

"Manager's office." And so, all over again. Acknowledgment of defeat at last. Pete walked up and down. Again the telephone rang. Furiously he dashed to it; viciously shouted: "Hell-o!"

"Pete Ashe, don't you dare use that tone to me!" It was Elizabeth. "Who on earth have you been talking to at this hour of the night? I've been sitting here for ages—and they kept saying your line was busy! Pete—the most extraordinary thing! A man called me up to tell me to make you give up buying that place—"

"What?"

For two minutes they exchanged experiences. When he hung up the receiver at last Pete looked grim and determined. "We'll see about this," he said to himself. "By George—if a man can't spend his own money as he likes!"

He wasn't sleepy any more, and he was reminded that he had better make an entry of the check he had given Crocker, and see how much money he had left. He wasn't rich any more, of course, but he didn't care. And he was only relatively poor, anyway. A few minutes of figuring revealed something extremely interesting. His purchase from Crocker had brought his expenditures, since his inheritance, to a sum slightly in excess of the draft the lawyers had sent him. Yet he had eight hundred or more dollars in the bank, and checks coming, for work done and delivered, to the tune of about twenty-four hundred more. He didn't owe a cent in the world. At any time before his legacy he would have regarded his present estate as one of almost shameful affluence. He shook his head. Life was queer—damned queer!

He knew exactly what he was going to do. He and Elizabeth had settled upon that—she was just as furious at the voice over the telephone as he was. He was, first, going to wait until Monday, and eliminate any possible legal technicalities by getting a deed from Crocker, and having it recorded—whatever that was, and wherever and however you did it. Then he was going down to camp out in the house and find out what the devil all this sculduggery meant.

Elizabeth had said that she was going too, but, of course, he wouldn't let her. You never could tell; this sounded like plain idiocy, all this business of printed warnings and mysterious telephone calls, but these birds might mean mischief, and he wasn't going to let Elizabeth take any chances. When you came right down to it, he was just as conservative and old-fashioned and reactionary as Denny himself, about some things. He wondered how Denny felt, and grinned. He had had colds himself, in the days when he was still living at home, and subject to home discipline and remedies.

SUNDAY passed uneventfully. Pete worked all day; apparently you had to keep on going, when you once got started. He called up Crocker's office Monday morning and asked him to hurry things along, and Crocker, sounding puzzled, asked him to come downtown at once.

"Can you account for this, Mr. Ashe?" he said. He showed Pete a typewritten, unsigned letter, in which he was warned on no account to sell his property to Ashe.

Pete stared; then exploded.

"Astonishing!" said Crocker, when he had heard Pete's story. "I am completely at a loss! However, if you prefer not to go on with the deal, in view of this, I shall be glad to return your check and tear up our contract."

"Hardly!" said Pete. "I'm going to take this thing apart and find out what's inside. No—let's get the thing finished as soon as we can. I have to get this deed recorded, don't I?"

"Yes—at the Suffolk county seat, Riverhead," said Crocker. "I've a man there who looks after such things for me—I own a good deal of Long Island property besides this. I'll be glad to have him do it for you."

Pete went around to see Elizabeth that evening—being reasonably sure that Denny wouldn't turn up. He had had no more warnings, but Elizabeth had; some one had called her up at her office, urging her to use her influence to keep Pete away from Long Island.

"Swell chance!" said Pete. "I'm going down tomorrow morning."

"What time?"

"Bet, you're not going! I won't have it."

"I certainly am!"

"You certainly are not! And that's that. How's Denny?"

"Better. But he can't go out till tomorrow. I'm sorry he was so horrid Saturday, Pete. I don't think he means to be—"

"Oh, that's all right! He doesn't like me. I wouldn't, either, if I were he."

She decided not to pursue that line.

"Pete!" she said, in a voice that brought him to attention.

"Yes?"

"How much was your legacy?"

"I've forgotten — exactly. Forty-seven thousand dollars and some loose change."

He never lied to Elizabeth. It wasn't any use, as he had long since found out. She stared at him now.

"Pete! And you paid forty-five thousand for that place! Practically every cent you inherited!"

"Oh, it took all there was left of that!" he said airily. "I used some for the car, you know, and paying bills, and all that sort of thing."

"Then—you're broke again!"

"I am not! I've got about eight hundred in the bank, and a lot of checks coming. I've done more work since I got that money than I ever did in six months before. Don't know why—just felt like it. I don't know; it seems as if I couldn't get down to work when I needed money. But as soon as I've got plenty I'd rather work than eat."

She paid no attention to that—although, perhaps it sank in, and was filed for future reference.

"Pete!" she said. "Why did you spend all your money on that place?"

"Well—you liked it," he said defensively.

"But, Pete—you can't—I couldn't—you're absurd! I don't know how to talk to you, even—"

"Look here," he said. "Let's get this settled, once and for all. Don't you interrupt—let me finish saying something, just for once, before you butt in!

"I'm in love with you. I always have been. I guess I always will be. Nothing seems to make any difference to that. God knows Denny doesn't! I don't know why you're engaged to him—you're not any more in love with him than with the traffic cop at Ninth Street. Wait a minute—you're not to interrupt!

"Maybe you're going to marry Denny. I don't know. I won't believe it till I see you coming out of church—but there it is. You may. All right. You like this house. I've got some money I didn't expect to have. I can get more fun out of using it to buy this house and give it to you than any way I can think of. And you can't stop me. That's all there is to it."

ELIZABETH'S reply was characteristic, although those who had only a superficial knowledge of her would not have known that.

"I am so in love with Denny!" she said. "I'm crazy about him. You've no business to say I'm not! And Pete—oh, Pete!—you're perfectly adorable about the house! But can't you see? How could I let you do such a thing?"

"I don't see why you can't. It was my money, wasn't it? And I can tell you no one ever got more fun out of spending money than I did out of this. Lord, Bet—to be able to get you something you really wanted!"

"You ought to have saved it—invested it—had an income—"

"Three thousand a year!" he scoffed. "I can make twice that even when I loaf half the time. And another thing: You haven't married Denny yet. Suppose you don't. Suppose you change your mind, and marry me, instead. Wouldn't the house come in handy, then?"

She gave it up. Every one always said, of course, that you couldn't argue with Pete; that it was like trying to flatten an India-rubber ball.

"Anyway," she said, "I'm going down with you tomorrow. What time will you come for me?"

"I'm not coming," he said. "Once and for all—no, Bet. Not till I find out what's going on down there. The chances are, it's some one's idea of a joke, but I want to be sure. Be reasonable."

She considered him, with puckered brows and tight lips.

"All right," she said at last. "I suppose I can't make you take me."

"I couldn't, Bet," he said, pleadingly. "Can't you see that? I'd never forgive myself if I did, and something happened."

"I hate to have you go down there alone," she said. "It's awfully creepy, Pete. Perhaps you'd better wait awhile before you go yourself—"

He shook his head.

"I will not," he said. "I got a complete set of keys from Crocker today. If there's any funny business that chap Morgan's mixed up in it, so I'm not taking any chances with him. I'm going to try to get through Amagansett without his seeing me. There's a back road, over by the beach, that I can take, I think, and avoid the main street altogether."

"Why don't you get Bill Ramsay to go with you?"

He shook his head again.

"Rather see it through by myself. I don't want to get any one else mixed up in it, if it should turn out to be anything serious. But it won't. Don't you worry, Bet. I'll be all right. This is the twentieth century."

"Not down there. I wish I'd seen that man who looked out of the window. I'd know then whether he was the one who telephoned."

"How?" Pete asked, amazed.

"I don't know—but I would. Oh, well! Telephone me as soon as you know anything tomorrow, Pete. Have you any idea where the nearest phone is?"

"Montauk, I suppose. That isn't much of a village, I guess, but they must have a phone in the railway station."

"I don't like it," she said. "And I hate to be out of anything! But I suppose you're right not to take me, Pete."

"Of course I am, Bet. And everything'll be all right. I'll call you up the first minute I can. You'll be home tomorrow night, won't you?"

"If I'm not I'll see that you know where to reach me. You'd better go now, Pete. It's getting late."

PETE made what seemed to him ample preparations for his trip and anything that might come of it. The car, when he started in the morning, was stocked with canned goods, crackers, coffee, evaporated milk and other provisions. He had an army automatic and a shotgun, and he smiled rather grimly when he went over both weapons, after he had gone home from Elizabeth's. You couldn't get very far with a man over the telephone, but if it came to personal contact Pete meant to be ready. And it was his plan and purpose to stay at the house until he found out what all the shouting was about.

The trip down was glorious. Motorcycle policemen must rest sometime; Pete chose to assume, and seemed justified in doing so, that a Tuesday morning was a good time to find them off duty. There was no traffic to speak of, except in the heart of the towns through which he passed. He sneaked through Amagansett just as he had planned to do, and never saw Morgan at all; assumed, accordingly, as we all do in such cases, that Morgan couldn't have seen him.

There was something wildly thrilling for him about the country once Amagansett was left behind. It was, perhaps, the contrast of the turbulent waste of sand and ocean after the smooth lawns and the villas of the Hamptons. Here was a world as elemental as wind and sea. The sun could do its work here; bleach and purify. You had to come to grips with things here. The neat Coast Guard station was in itself a reminder of something as far from neat as it could be—a winter Atlantic gale, with its toll of wreck.

A figure, standing before him in the road, didn't seem to concern him and his progress at all, at first. He saw it; sounded his horn, instinctively; expected it to stand aside. It didn't, and he slowed, angrily, heeding a waving arm. He saw a boy with yellow hair, dressed like a fisherman, in blue jersey and sailor's trousers.

"Your name Ashe?" the boy asked.

"Yes."

"Got a note for you. Here it is."

He held out an envelope; turned away. But Pete hailed him.

"Wait a minute!" He tore open the envelope; wasn't surprised, really, by what he read on the half-sheet of paper it contained.

"Go home," he read. "Don't be a bigger fool than God made you."

"Who gave you this?" Pete asked.

"Man."

"What sort of man?"

"None of your business. Better do like it says."

"What do you know about all this nonsense?"

"More'n you do, I guess. Beat it."

"Suppose I don't!"

"More fool you!"

"What do you mean?"

"Guess you'll find out."

Furious, Pete drove on. As well talk to one of the sand hills! He didn't know what he expected to see when he reached the house. He had his automatic in the seat beside him—and he told himself he wouldn't hesitate to use it, either. People who acted like this needn't be considered; they had only themselves to blame for whatever happened to them.

But his arrival was, rather disappointingly, wholly uneventful. There was no sound except the steady beating of the surf below, and the cry of a gull, sometimes, above. Nor were there signs that any one had been about since Saturday. He had to experiment among the keys Crocker had given him, but he found the right one for the front door at last, and opened it. Leaning against the wall was a sheet of cardboard. On it another warning was smeared, in green paint.

"Keep out!" it ran. "Go back where you came from!"

He laughed angrily, and put his foot through the placard. But he was conscious of a certain nervousness as he went through the house. It was a queer sort of business; no getting away from that. Odd sounds came to his ears; creaks, squeaks, groans. But he knew how noisy an empty house can be; these sounds, he was sure, had no significance.

EVERY room contained a new warning. Sometimes it was written on the back of an envelope; sometimes on a great piece of cardboard like the one he had found in the entrance hall. And he realized, as he went on, that whoever had left the warnings was something of an expert in applied psychology. The silly things had a queer, disconcerting, cumulative effect. They made him jumpy and nervous, or, at least, helped to do so.

Every time he opened a door he expected, almost, to find some one in the room. And here was more psychology. On Saturday most of the doors had been open. Now every one was closed. Some one had calculated, rather cleverly, the effect of that upon his nerves. After a while a new refinement of annoyance appeared. Not only were the doors closed, but things had been put against them, inside, so that when he opened them there was a crash of falling objects. The first time that happened he jumped back, pistol in hand, ready to fire. Then he went on, and saw only a pile of fire wood.

He was a good deal shaken when he went downstairs, after a complete inspection of the upper part of the house. He hated himself for it, but his hand was trembling as he worked to adjust the key to the door that led down to the cellar, and it took all the resolution and stubbornness he had to make him go down the steep, narrow stairs into the darkness. He had a flashlight, though, and he made himself go on.

The cellar looked all right. There was a big, white furnace; he could see the openings of the great oil tank—obviously the main reservoir was outside. The cellar was spotlessly clean; it was also absolutely dry. It had a cement floor, and the walls were bricked and whitewashed. In one corner were some tools—gardening things, trowels, a rake, a pair of shovels, a hose, looped about a carrier. But the cellar was as barren of clues as to the meaning of the warnings as the rest of the house had been. Then, suddenly, as if in his very ear, a deep, sepulchral voice called his name.

"Ashe! Is that you, Ashe? Go away!"

He spun around, amazed. His back was to the furnace; he felt—and knew he must look—like a man at bay.

"Who's that?" he cried. "Where are you?"

"Where you can't find me," said the voice. It was an amazing voice, hoarse and rumbling; it sounded like the voice of the dragon in "Siegfried"—as if, that is, some one were speaking through a huge megaphone.

"We don't want to hurt you, Ashe," the voice went on. "Stay away from here. You had ample warning before you bought this house. We have nothing against you. But it is dangerous for you to be here."

"You mean it's dangerous for you!" cried Pete. Mysterious as the voice was—it seemed to fill the cellar, and not to come from any single point or direction—he felt much better now that the other people had, to some extent, disclosed themselves.

"Perhaps that is just what we do mean. But that makes it quite as true that it is dangerous for you to be here. This is the last warning you will receive. After this we intend to act—not to warn!"

"Act and be damned!" cried Pete. I've got a pretty good actor with me, too—a .44 automatic pistol and a few clips of cartridges. Some one's going to get hurt if you try to start anything around here. This place belongs to me—I order you out."

Only hoarse, rumbling laughter answered him. He stood for some time, calling and shouting; had to give it up, then, and went upstairs, into the sunlight of the great living-room. He went to the door, then, and looked out at his car; upon an impulse he went over and locked the steering-wheel lock, and the switch. If these chaps were really up to mischief they might very well try to steal his car—and he had no mind to be left afoot in circumstances like these, and at such a distance from civilization.

The house stood in off the road; a driveway had been built up to it, through the sandy soil, about a hundred yards in length, which ended in a circle, with a tangentlike opening to the garage, which formed, really, a part of the house. The weather was fine and fairly warm; Pete saw no reason, as yet at least, for putting the car inside. If he needed it he might very well need it quickly, and he was no great hand, yet, at maneuvering in close quarters. He could back into or out of the garage if he had to, but he wasn't looking for that sort of work—especially in case it had to be done in a hurry.

HE HAD locked the switch, and was just starting back to the house when something made him turn and look and listen. He didn't exactly hear anything; he was just conscious, through some sense, perhaps a sixth one, of another presence. As he looked about he saw a man coming in from the road, walking as if he were tired. A young man, this seemed to be, dressed very much like himself, in brown tweed jacket and knickers, and with a pack on his back. He stiffened and waited. Perhaps he was about to have an explanation at last.

Then something about the approaching figure struck him as out of the ordinary. He stared. Then he jumped. It wasn't a man at all, but a woman—a girl. And then he cried out. For it wasn't a girl—any girl. It was Elizabeth.

"Bet!" he cried, and raced toward her. "Where on earth did you come from?"

"Montauk," she said. "Oh, Pete! Did you ever travel the whole length of Long Island on a train that stopped at *every* station? And when I got there, there wasn't anything to bring me over! I thought of course I'd be able to get a cab. But they just laughed at me!"

"But, Bet—why on earth did you come? You oughtn't—"

"You might just as well have driven me down and let me be comfortable," she said. "Did you suppose I wouldn't come? Did you think I'd let you come down here alone?"

"Well—this does settle it!" he said. "The whole show's off. I'll take you home. Unless—Bet, won't you be reasonable, and take the train back from Amagansett if I drive you over?"

"Of course I won't!" she said. "I won't go one step from here. And you can't make me. You can make me get in the car, but you can't drive if you hold me in, and if you don't I'll jump out. Quit, Pete. You know me—and you know I'll stay, now that I'm here."

He tried to argue further, but she cut him short.

"Pete, you brought something to eat, didn't you? I had breakfast at half-past five to catch that awful train, and I'm so faint I could drop!"

"Oh, all right!" he said, and surrendered. "I might have known enough to expect something like this last night, when you were so darned peaceful about not coming! And—oh, Bet! I'm a skunk to say it, but I'm so darned glad you're here!"

"Are you, Pete? Tell me: what have you found?"

He told her about the fisher boy on the road, and the placards and signs, and about the voice in the cellar.

"Pete! How on earth could they manage that? That's the weirdest thing I ever heard of!"

"Hanged if I know! It beats me. I even sounded the walls—there's no sign of a door of any kind, anywhere. Well, anyway—come on and get rested, and I'll make some coffee and rustle some lunch."

She sat down in the kitchen while he made that program good, and watched him, which showed that she was really tired, because Elizabeth always insisted on doing such work herself. Pete said it was because she wouldn't trust him, but she said it proved how essentially feminine she was, even though she was a business woman.

Food and hot coffee revived Elizabeth swiftly and greatly.

"It is heavenly here, Pete, isn't it?" she said. "Pete, let's go for a swim after a while, when we've had time to digest this stuff! I brought a bathing-suit in my pack—"

He shouted with laughter.

"If that isn't like you! We can't, though, Bet. It's too early—that ocean's ice-water still. And, anyway, I wouldn't dare leave the place to go. No telling what we'd find when we got back."

"I suppose that's so," she said. "I'd love a swim, though. But there'll be plenty of chances for that later, won't there? What shall we do, Pete?"

"Nothing. Just wait. It's all we can do. I might make a fire; it's chilly in the house—"

"Oh, do! I'm crazy to see a fire in that living-room, anyway. Did you notice the andirons, Pete? They're marvelous."

"Yep. Can you use a gun, Bet? This kind?"

He held out the automatic. But she produced a smaller one of her own—a short-barreled, businesslike revolver.

"I used to be a good shot at a mark," she said. "I never fired at anything moving—but I think I could manage, at short range."

"All right! You keep watch, then, and I'll go down to the beach and find some driftwood for the fire. There's kindling down cellar, and lots of paper around. Not that I think there'll be much doing before dark— Say!"

"What's the matter now?"

"Why, just that! There's mighty little chance that they'll start anything during the day, whoever they are. And—"

"Pete, you absurd mid-Victorian! Are you worrying about me and my reputation? Did you hear about the war? Times have changed, Pete!"

"Maybe they have and maybe they haven't," he said sulkily. "Time enough to think about that, anyway. How's Denny today?" he added, viciously.

"I don't know—I didn't call up before I left," she said curtly. "Go on and get your wood, if you're going."

HE REMEMBERED having seen a wheelbarrow in the garage, went and got it, and trundled it down to the beach. There was plenty of wood, and he gathered two loads and brought it up, and then went down cellar for kindling. Elizabeth went with him, and hunted all about for some clue to the voice. They heard nothing, this time; evidently the voice had meant what it had said—that it was giving Pete his last warning.

They locked the cellar door behind them when they came up; even though they hadn't found anything, it seemed fairly certain that the cellar was one, at least, of the danger spots, and contained some secret entrance to the house. And, as whoever got in that way evidently had a key, they made a sort of barricade against it, using the kitchen table and some chairs.

"That won't keep any one from getting in," said Pete, when they had done. "But we'll hear them knocking it out of the way, anyway."

They had a fire going before long, and Pete pulled a big couch over in front of the fireplace, and made Elizabeth lie down, and threw an army blanket over her. She was asleep in five minutes, and he sat for a long time, looking at her. She was adorable! He loved the firelight on her flushed face, and the way the short hair curled about her head and over her neck, and the way she slept, with one arm thrust under her pillow, like a child. She looked so absurdly young, lying there; she wasn't the self-contained, self-reliant Elizabeth of every day at all. He wasn't sure just how old she was; about twenty-seven, he thought.

He wondered about Denny. He always did, when he had a chance to look at Elizabeth like this, when she didn't know he was watching her. Why had Bet done that—promised to marry Denny? It wasn't as if plenty of other chaps hadn't been after her to marry them. Others besides Pete. Nice fellows, too, some of them; chaps Pete knew and liked—aside from their feeling about Bet.

Queer, anyway, about girls like Elizabeth—not that there really were any girls like her, but girls who came to New York, and made good, as she had. He knew others. They held down important jobs, and were well paid. Here was Bet. She made a hundred dollars a week, or darned near that much. But she'd engaged herself to a poor fish like Denny. And other girls did very much the same thing. They seemed to be able to go along just about so far, and then something got them, and they got married, and you stopped hearing about them.

Sometimes Pete was perfectly sure Elizabeth would never marry Denny, and sometimes he wasn't sure at all. You couldn't tell about her. He couldn't, at least. He couldn't make her out. If she could stand being engaged to him she could see it through and marry him, Pete supposed. This was one of the times when he wasn't sure at all—when he rather thought she would. As for her marrying him, it was a queer thing, but he could talk to her about that, and urge her to; but he never dared, somehow, to think about it to himself. He was almost superstitious about that. He always checked himself abruptly when, as sometimes happened, he found himself thinking how wonderful it would be if she would.

He grew restless and nervous after a while, and got up very quietly, and went out of the room. It would be a good idea, he thought, to lock everything up—doors and windows. They could get in, he knew, if they really wanted to, but at least he would hear them if they tried it, and have some warning. Elizabeth was still asleep when he went back, but she heard him, and stirred, and said something, still in her sleep. He caught his breath; he had to fight with himself to keep from going over, and gathering her up in his arms, and kissing her.

He never had kissed her, except once. That was the time when they were out walking, and she slipped, and hurt her ankle so badly that he'd had to pick her up and hold her until a cab came along. And it had hurt so that in the cab she had cried, and clung to him, and he had kissed her then, and she'd let him. But that had been a long time ago, before Denny had come along.

He put more wood on the fire from time to time, and it burned just as she had said it would, in marvelous and mysterious colors, that had the sea and all its beauty in them. He pulled over a big chair and sat in it; soon the warmth of the room, the weariness of his drive and his later activity overcame him; he began to nod and go off to sleep, to wake with a start and then go off again. Presently he was just as sound asleep as she.

They slept there, the two of them, while the fire broke up into glowing, crumbling embers, and the shadows lengthened in the room, and the surf sounded its soothing, peaceful murmur, and dusk began to come, outside, and darken the sea that rolled in upon the beach.

WHEN Pete awoke, with a sudden start, with an indefinable sense of something alien, sinister, it was almost dark. A faint glow from the hearth still lighted the room, fitfully; in a sudden flaring up of the dying fire he could see Elizabeth, still peacefully asleep, her face flushed. He could hear her low, even breathing. But he was on his feet, awake all over, tense, startled, watchful.

He didn't know what had awakened him. Some sound, certainly. But now, as he listened, he could hear nothing. Only the tranquil note of the surf, beating in its steady rhythm.

"Elizabeth!" he said, his voice pitched low. "Elizabeth!"

She turned; stretched her arms.

"Yes? What is it?" She sat up lazily, luxuriously; stretched her arms again. "I've been asleep! Oh, Pete! I feel so good, so rested! I don't know when I've slept like that! For heaven's sake, how dark it is! What time is it?"

He looked at the illuminated face of his watch.

"Can't quite make out—the stuff's worn on this watch. Some time after seven, though. You didn't hear anything, did you?"

"No—did you?"

"Something woke me up. I don't know what. You stay here—keep your gun handy. I'm going to have a look around."

Gun in one hand, flashlight in the other, he went through the house. Nothing had been disturbed; everything seemed to be as he had left it, especially the barricade at the cellar door. He frowned. And then, when he went to the front door, he made his discovery. It was locked—and his key refused to turn. Swiftly he tried the other doors—to find them similarly secured. So with all the ground-floor windows—they were wedged from the outside.

He went back to Elizabeth with his report, and they stared at one another.

"Locked in!" she said. "But—for heaven's sake why? What object could any one have? They wanted to keep us out first—"

"I was a fool to fall asleep," he said. "There's something doing, all right—something mighty queer."

Here was the first definite, concrete thing he had had to face. And it had, somehow, a disproportionate significance. All that had gone before assumed, now, a new and more sinister importance. He had been angry before—but half amused, too, as at a game that was being played, a joke, with himself as its butt. But this—this looked serious. He was vaguely alarmed. More than ever he was afraid because Elizabeth was there. Dragging her into a mess like this!

But if Pete was rather vaguely alarmed, there was nothing in the least vague about his anger. He was going to see this thing through, now, no matter what happened. And he was going to show these people, whoever they were, and whatever their object might be, that they'd tackled the wrong man.

Getting out was not, as a matter of fact, particularly difficult. They could smash a window. But Peter wasn't sure that the time for such a step had come yet. Nor that, for that matter, he wanted to be outside. The house was the focal point of the mystery; it was wholly possible that this whole trick of locking him in had been intended simply to serve as a means for getting him out. When he suggested this idea Elizabeth agreed that it was plausible.

"We'll wait awhile, anyway," she said. "Pete—the key to the whole thing's in the cellar. I don't know how or where—but that's the place we ought to watch."

"I think so, too," he said. "But we've got to go easy, Bet. We don't want to get separated, unless it's absolutely necessary."

"No," she said. "Pete—I *am* scared! The whole thing's so—so unreasonable! If you could figure out why they should act this way! But it just makes my head ache when I try—and I don't get any nearer knowing—or even guessing!"

"LOOK here," he said. "They're probably watching us. But they mayn't know we've found out about being locked in—I didn't make any fuss when I went around. Let's act just as naturally as we can. I'll build up the fire again—"

"And I'll get something to eat—it's my turn, and I can easily fix up a meal in the kitchen. Thank Heaven it's an oil stove."

"Good! You know, when you get right down to it, we've probably got them guessing, too. They probably can't figure us out at all."

"I don't wonder, either! I suppose we're the prize idiots of the world, Pete—coming down here and getting caught like this, all by ourselves—"

"By Jove! That's another thing!" said Pete. "How do they know we haven't cooked it up to have our gang coming along, later? They saw me come along—and they probably saw you. They may not know you're a girl—you don't look like one, a little way off, in those things. And for all they know we've got relays of reenforcements coming. They've got a few things to think about, too!"

It was a line of thought the accuracy of which, of course, only the event could prove. But it did serve to cheer them up, and to make dinner a more amusing and enjoyable meal. They ate in the kitchen, for convenience.

"I say, Bet," Pete said presently. "I don't want to—I mean—how about Denny? This isn't exactly going to make him sing hymns of praise, is it? I mean—won't he think it's pretty sour?"

"Oh, I suppose so!" said Elizabeth. "Poor Denny!"

She sat silent and thoughtful.

"Elizabeth, it is a queer show, isn't it? You and Denny. I mean—honestly, you've got about as much in common as a trout and a machine-gun!"

She laughed; she couldn't help it. And she wanted to know which she was.

"Oh, I'm not trying to be funny, Bet! It just gets me, that's all."

She looked at him soberly, curiously.

"It got me, too, Pete," she said. "That's why."

He stared. "I don't know what you mean," he said.

"The whole thing," she said. "Me. The way things were going. Do you realize that I get awfully tired, sometimes, Pete? Tired of working? Tired of just—oh, keeping on? Doing things we aren't really meant to do—girls, I mean? Because we're not. Men are right about women in business: it's not their game. Oh, they're good at it! I'm good, and so are lots of other women. You'd be a good cook, too, if you worked at it—but you wouldn't want to do it, no matter how much you got paid.

"I suppose it's biological, when you come down to it. We want—oh, all of us do, even if we won't admit it!—to stay home, and have a man go out and provide for us. We want to have kids, and a home that isn't just a place we come to after work, when we're too darned tired to appreciate it."

"Well—but—what in the world's all that got to do with Denny?" Pete asked. Because, after all, being engaged to Denny certainly hadn't changed things much for Elizabeth. Not yet, anyway.

"Lots," she answered. "Denny's different. What sort of men did I know before? Nice infants, making fifty dollars a week. Or delightful wasters like you, who wouldn't do a stroke of work except when you absolutely had to! I might have fallen in love with some of you—maybe I did! But how the dickens could I marry any of you? If I had I'd have had to go on working, anyway. You know it darned well, too, Pete Ashe! You asked me to marry you—but you didn't want us to be *married*, at all. You just wanted us to live together—"

"Elizabeth! I never—good Lord, I never even dreamed of such a thing!"

She laughed.

"Oh, I know you wanted us to be married—have a wedding!" she said. "But what difference does a ceremony make? It might just as well have been the other thing, so far as anything that really mattered went. Just think, Pete! Think of all the people we know like that. Both of them working—because they've got to, to make ends meet. What sort of *marriage* have they got?

"And Denny—well, he was different. He'd expect his wife to stay home. He wouldn't marry at all until he could do everything he wanted to do. He won't now. He doesn't even think about it. He wouldn't let me go on working one day after we were married. Can't you see, Pete?"

"I—yes, I guess I can," said Pete. "I—I guess I didn't stop to do an awful lot of thinking. If I had—"

"Yes!" she said. Her voice was hard, suddenly, and sounded as if she were sneering. "But you've *got* to think things like that out yourself, Pete! You can't have them told to you. I tried—"

SHE stopped. But she needn't have been afraid of giving herself away. Pete was thinking now, all right, however much he had failed to do so in the past.

"Gee, Elizabeth!" he said slowly. "Things look—you know, it seems to me, just lately, that I'm a lot older. As if I'd grown up, somehow, since I got that money. I see what you mean exactly. And I—you know—if we had got married, when I asked you to, first, Bet, I'd have made you stop working, too. I can see now that the other sort of thing wouldn't have helped a bit, really. And I could have done it, too. I—I guess I've loafed an awful lot—"

"Oh, you're all right, Pete!" she said wearily. "Sh-h! Listen."

"What is it?"

"I thought I heard something." They waited, tense, a full minute. Then they relaxed. "Just my imagination, I suppose," she said. "But it's pretty nearly time for them to do something, Pete, don't you think?"

"I'm going to work on one of the windows," he said. "There's one that isn't wedged as well as the others—I'd rather get one loose than break glass, because they could hear that. But I noticed this one, in the hall. Come on."

"They can see us, can't they?" said Elizabeth, as she went with him to the window.

"Oh, sure—if they're looking. But this is on the wrong side of the house. They're more likely to keep watch out in front, I think. See—the frame's warped a little. I think I ought to be able to work around it with a knife and get it loose enough to push out."

"Isn't there some way you can get a pane of glass out quietly? Every one ought to study elementary house-breaking, I think—every one gets locked out, some time or another!"

"There is a way—but you've got to have a glass-cutter to work it. And a year's practice, probably, too. No—if I can't loosen the wedges I'm just going to take a good swing and let 'em hear me!"

She held a flashlight steady for him while he worked. They hadn't found out how to make the electric-light plant work; the batteries were probably out, anyway, Pete said, and he'd forgotten to ask Mr. Crocker about it. They'd found candles, though, and managed pretty well.

The job Pete had tackled proved to be one of those tantalizing and maddening ones that seem always on the verge of being finished and never are. He got his knife into play easily enough, but the wedge he was attacking was extremely obstinate, and it was ten minutes before he pushed it out.

And he found, then, that that didn't loosen the others enough to make them give, as he had hoped it would, and had to go work on another.

"You don't have to stand up," he said to Elizabeth. "Sit down on that bench—you can throw the light over here all right. No use getting all tired out. We can't tell what's ahead of us."

It was trying, tiring work, and it took all his attention. He had to do his work in extremely close quarters, and he scraped all the skin from his knuckles long before he was in sight of the end. But:

"Got it, by Gad!" he cried at last.

As he cried out Elizabeth screamed, suddenly, and the flash went out. Pete spun around in the darkness. He heard a struggle; flung himself across the room toward Elizabeth, and was hurled back by a savage kick that landed on his chest and sent him staggering. He lost his balance and fell, but in a moment he was up—only to hear a door—the kitchen door, he was sure, slam. He reached it as it closed; overcame some one's attempt to hold it closed from the other side, and dashed into the kitchen, where a candle still burned, just in time to see a man's legs disappearing behind the door that led down to the cellar. He heard Elizabeth scream again. But by the time he reached the door it was not only shut but locked, and he heard a mocking laugh from below.

He didn't waste a second this time. A stout chair served him as a weapon, and at once he launched a furious assault on the door. A panel gave at last, and he was able to turn the key. He had another flashlight in his pocket, and he was on his way down the stairs, a beam of light preceding him, hardly more than a minute after the door had been locked. But the cellar was empty.

THERE was no sign, no trace, either of Elizabeth or of the man or men who had seized her and carried her down. For a moment Pete stood staring, amazed, appalled. He wondered if he could have been mistaken, if they had taken Elizabeth some other way. But he had seen one man go down the stairs, he had just half run, half fallen down, and he had heard Elizabeth cry out.

Just for an instant Pete stood stock-still, dazed, wondering if he were mad, if this whole thing were not a nightmare. Then, with a cry, he began his search. He tore at the wall in a dozen places; he was like some wild creature, trying to fight its way out of a cage. His hands were raw and bleeding when, at last, he stopped and stood still, panting. He fought for self-control.

Elizabeth and the men who snatched her away had been in the cellar. They had not left it by the only apparent means of doing so—the stairs that led up to the kitchen and the door that he had smashed. But they were gone. A mouse couldn't have escaped his search. He had even opened the door of the furnace and flashed his light inside—to see a fire box swept and garnished, cleaned and painted since the last fire had been drawn, so that even the grate bars shone.

They were gone, and no trace of them remained—no clue to the secret door that there must be. Again he made his rounds of the walls, tapping everywhere in a search for some place where a hollow sound might betray a false wall. There was none. He went down on hands and knees and covered the floor in the same way. Once he heard a laugh—and was reminded of the ghostly and mysterious voice that had, that morning, given him a warning—a last warning.

He straightened up and stood, at last, as near to sheer panic as he had ever been in his life. He barred the supernatural; there was a door. But he couldn't find it; couldn't hope to find it if he had all night—all the time there was—to seek it. And he had no time at all. The thought of Elizabeth a prisoner, in the power of the men who had carried her off, maddened him.

"Hello!" he shouted. "Hello—hello—hello! I'll do what you tell me. I'll get out—I'll stay away—if you'll bring back that lady!"

Again he heard the laugh, and then a voice—but not the same voice he had heard that morning. About this one there was a quality sinister, evil, to the last degree.

"Too late," it said. "You had your warning, Ashe. Don't worry about trying to help the lady. You'll need help yourself before you're five minutes older. Get out of that cellar, you fool, while you still can!"

The sheer, vicious snap of that order sent him to the foot of the stairs; his action was purely reflex. Then he turned, in a blind rage, gun in hand. A voice from above made him spin around again.

"Come up here, Ashe!" it cried. "Quick, now!"

He sent his flashlight up the stairs; saw a dim figure; fired. Even as his pistol roared out, reverberating in the confined space of the cellar, there was a rush of feet behind him—in the cellar that had, a moment before, been, save for himself, as empty as the grave! He flung up his pistol hand, but before he could fire again something crashed on his head, and he went down like a log, unconscious.

WHEN Pete began to struggle back to the possession of some scattered fragments of his wits, he was conscious, first, of a throbbing, blinding headache, and next of motion. He was bumping about; realized, a moment later, that he was in a car—and on its floor. He groaned; struggled to raise himself; succeeded, finally, in spite of the swaying of the machine, which was being driven at high speed along an extremely rough road. He saw at once that only one other man was in the car; wondered even in his pain and confusion, if he could overpower him. Then a jolt threw him against the door, and he cried out. At once the car slowed; the driver turned to look at Pete.

"Hello! Comin' out of it, buddy? You'd ought to know better than hit that stuff! Bad enough to sell it—but drinkin' it yourself!"

Somewhere in the dim, distant caverns of Pete's memory that voice struck a familiar chord. It was an exquisite sort of agony to try to concentrate, or think, or do anything but sink again under the resurgent black waves that seemed determined to engulf him and drag him back into unconsciousness. But Pete made the effort.

"Bill!" he croaked. "Bill!"

The car was stopped with a jerk. The dome light flashed on.

"For the love of Mike—what goes on here?" said Bill, the demon taxi-driver. "The saints preserve us—Mr. Ashe! How come you're in with this gang?"

Pete's mind really wasn't working yet. It failed entirely to heed the damning evidence against Bill, who ought to have been driving his taxi in New York and was, instead, aiding and abetting in the abduction of a man already half killed by his confederates. He only knew that in some previous incarnation he had trusted Bill, and leaned upon him, and found no reason to feel that his trust had been misplaced. Hence, as well as he could, for the throbbing of his head and the pain that accompanied every movement and every word, he told Bill what had happened.

"I might have known!" said Bill. "They told me you'd passed out—see?—that you'd hit the hootch too hard—"

"The crooks!" cried Pete.

"Crooks is right—I'll tell the world!" said Bill. "Cheest—if a man's own house don't belong to him no more, what's comin' next, hey? Bootlegging's all right—I'm against prohibition myself—"

"Bootlegging!" cried Pete. The word was like a solvent; like the drop of liquid that, poured into a vessel full of a cloudy liquid clears it as if by magic. He understood it all—or nearly all. "Bootleggers! Of course—and we never thought of it! What a pair of fools!"

"See here, boss," said Bill. "We want to get busy. I'm thinking—see? You're sure you hunted through that cellar good, ain't you?"

"I tell you I went over every inch of the walls and the floor!" Pete cried, with the futile anger of one in his state.

"Sure—that's what I say," said Bill, soothingly. "Well—that's all for that, ain't it? We know there's a way into that cellar from outside. Ten to one it's from the beach, ain't it? I mean—that's reasonable, ain't it, now? You couldn't find the way out of the cellar—all right, it's up to to us to find the way in. They're holding the young lady, likely, to keep you from getting gay—see?"

"Here—what's this?" Pete had put his hand in a pocket; it came out with a sheet of paper He swore, with fervor. "Another of their damned notes! Printed—like the others!"

"Let's see," said Bill. And he spelled out the message: "You have had your lesson—or part of it. The girl is all right. She won't be hurt unless you make a fool of yourself again. Stay away. When we have finished what we're doing she will be turned loose. Give your keys to Morgan with a written order to act as your agent and try to sell the house for you."

"I'll see them damned—"

"Sure—sure! But we gotta handle them with kid gloves till we get the young lady away from them, boss—can't you see? They sorta got us in the hole right now, the way I see it. Listen, boss! You let me run this for a while, see? Your head-piece ain't quite right yet—it's not a whole lot of use to you right now. And I know some of these birds pretty well. I know the way they work. We got lots of time yet, the way I dope it."

"WHERE are we—how far from the house?"

"Not so far. That's what I'm thinkin' about, though, right now. I don't want to turn the car around—they'll be keepin' some sort of watch, though they won't be expectin' you back. Gave me orders to take you to your place in Flatbush, no matter what you told me if you woke up. Said you'd be as loony as pie-eyed rabbit, likely--said it always got you that way, and they didn't want you around. That sounded good to me—good enough. None of my show, anyway. They hired one of the boss's cars, see, and he took me off my taxi and told me to drive. If I hadn't 'a' known your voice, you'd be headin' for dear old Brooklyn right now."

He started the engine.

"What I want to do," he said, "is run this boat off in the sand where no one's so likely to see her, and then for us to hit the road back a ways. But I'm wonderin' whether you can make it. Get out and see how it goes."

Obediently Pete stretched, and then, rather tentatively, got out of the car. His head swam; for a moment he thought he was going to faint. But the thought of Elizabeth helped; he hung on to the car for a moment, and then broke away and took a few steps.

"Not so good," said Bill. "No wonder—they must 'a' handed you a peach!"

"I can make it, though," Pete insisted. "You're right—it wouldn't be safe to take the car. Come on!"

"Right—hold on a minute." Bill edged along the road; at a good-looking place he turned off, sharply, and with a great roar from the engine and with showers of sand kicking up under the wheels, sought a hiding-place among the dunes. Pete followed gingerly, and waited while Bill switched off the lights.

"She'll do," said Bill. "No one'll find her unless they fall over her. Come along, boss—I know how to fix you up. Right down to the beach."

He was carrying a collapsible water bucket he had taken from the car, and, when they reached the beach, he made Pete take off his coat, shirt, and undershirt, and then soused him with cold salt water. Two minutes of that, followed by a brisk rub with a rug, also borrowed from the car, did wonders. The buzzing in Pete's head subsided; new strength seemed to run through him.

"They got my gun," he said. Then he gave a sudden shout. "No, by Jove—they left it!"

"Oh, they thought they'd put you out for keeps!" said Bill. "They knew me—see? But they didn't know it all, did they? Freeze to that cannon, boss—it may come in handy, at that."

Once they were on the beach, they stayed. Bill, for many reasons, was against the road. And, since the tide was low, they should, he thought, be able to get around the headland that guarded the western end of the cove that was their destination.

Walking in sand isn't easy when you are in the best of condition and at the top of your form. For Bill it wasn't so bad, though, as he explained, walking wasn't his lay. But for Pete it was hard beyond words. The secret of getting along well in sand is to lift your feet high, and Pete's shoes were, it seemed, soled with leaden plates instead of leather. Yet, somehow, they covered ground. For a mile before they reached the headland Bill kept looking out to sea; he seemed both relieved and disappointed at his failure to see anything. While they walked he told Pete what his altogether minor part in the proceedings had been.

"We get this call from Tony Remetti," he said. "Tony's the boss bootlegger down around Washington Square—he's the one all the janitors around there have to buy from, see—that's his territory. And Tony's been getting his hootch down in Jersey—down at the Highlands. But he's had a row down there, see—so he's got to find a new place; they ain't runnin' his kind from Canada much, no more. So he hooks up with this crowd here—this is his first trip. And the boss takes me off my cab because I know my way round, see, and I've driven Tony before."

"Your boss takes chances, doesn't he?" said Pete. He was perfectly sure that Bill winked, even though he couldn't see.

"He gets his," said Bill. "Five hundred for the use of me and the car—and Tony gives him two grand, in case the car gets pinched or wrecked or anything. Fair enough—you couldn't sell her for seven-fifty as is! But Tony gets his two grand back if we get back all K.O.

"So I drive Tony down, and figure all I've got to do is curl up in the car and pound my ear till they're ready to load her up and start back. But pretty soon along comes Tony with some of the other gang, holding you up, sort of, and shoving you along, and Tony tells me to take you home, and they give me the song and dance about you hittin' the hootch and passin' out. It's all the same to me, see—so we starts off.

"Now, the way I dope it, Tony didn't know much more'n I did about you. He ain't the kind o' wop that goes lookin' for trouble—and if he did, it'd be in a dark alley, with a knife. He gets the shakes if he sees a gun in a shop window, Tony does—he's got one of the grandest little yellow streaks you ever seen. They don't want to count on Tony if it gets rough later on. But I'm figurin' they don't know Tony yet like I do."

"WHAT'S your plan, Bill?" inquired Pete.

"Don't know, yet. Tactics, though—that's our lay. They got the weight—we gotta have the science—see?"

"I was wondering about getting hold of the Coast Guard men—there's a station not so far away."

Bill shook his head.

"Sounds good—but it ain't," he said. "Me—I ain't sayin' this gang's got any of them birds fixed, but I put it to you—if you was in their place, wouldn't you be as friendly as you knew how to get with any one that wore Uncle Sam's buttons on his pants? Sure you would. And, leavin' that out—suppose we fix up a raid. We might land 'em—and we might not. And they've got the young lady. No—we got to play the string out."

Pete was abominably tired; each step was harder to take than the last had been. But the headland was not far away now, and when they came up to it, and faced the task of getting around, Bill called a halt.

"It's a barefoot dancing act from now on," he said. "Take off your shoes and tie the laces—in a good, stiff knot. Then sling 'em round your neck. And remember—if you swing those shoes the lad that gets 'em on his jaw'll know something hit him."

He proved that three minutes later. They had to wade the last few feet of the journey around the headland; the wash of the surf was about their feet among the rocks. For a moment they paused. The cove lay before them; rocks poked their noses up out of the water to their right—and provided shelter for their journey to the beach—a journey Bill had greatly feared, and had even planned to avoid, if necessary, by a detour around the road and inland. They could see the house, dim and neutral against the background of sand and low shrubs.

It was Bill, not Pete, who first saw the lurking figure by one of the rocks; Bill who put his hand out swiftly to check Pete, and then crept forward while Pete, fascinated, stood watching, gun in hand, lest Bill need help. But Bill needed no help at all. His heavy shoes were as good a weapon as he had foretold; swung at arm's length, with all of Bill's considerable strength, they sent the sentry down without a cry. Bill was on him like a cat; had him tied hand and foot with tire straps even before Pete reached him.

"Ought to be gagged, too," he said. "Never thought of that—"

He stood, frowning, puzzling. It was Pete who was inspired, now, and reached down to bring up a handful of seaweed.

"Dirty trick!" he said, in a whisper. "It won't taste nice when he comes to!"

"We should worry. Here—stuff him good! That's the eye. Now a handkerchief to keep it in. Good night, nurse!"

"That's a good job well done!" said Pete.

"Means this much, too," said Bill. "They got something to be afraid of that you can come at this way. Way I dope it, there must be a tunnel that comes up to your cellar back there—see? They land the stuff—run it right up through the tunnel—and there you are! If there's revenooers after them, they've got a swell chance to catch 'em with the goods—I don't think! It's a good lay—no wonder they didn't want you foolin' around that house!"

"Hello!" said Pete. He was looking out to sea.

"What now?"

"Why, a minute ago I saw three white lights out there—and now there's nothing again! Wait—they may come again."

They did—but red, this time, and then, a moment later, white again.

"That's their runner!" said Bill, and drew a long breath. "Now, I wonder—"

"What?"

"How they work it here. Whether they have to go out, or they show a signal and the runner sends a boat in! You want to root for them to go out, boss! That's the biggest part of my plan! Attaboy—gee! What a lay-out they got! Look, boss—quick!"

Between two rocks the nose of a motorboat appeared. She came on out slowly—a long, low black craft, her lines proclaiming speed.

"One—two—three—four—seven of them! Good enough!" said Bill. "On your way—"

A low hail came to them across the water. "Dick—oh, Dick!"

"Holy Mother! The lad we crowned!" said Bill. "Cross your fingers, boss—I gotta take a big chance." He raised his voice. "Hello!"

"Everything all right there, Dick?"

"Sure!" Bill answered.

THE boat gathered speed. Its engine was muffled; there was none of the noise such a craft usually makes, but only the low hum of a powerful motor.

"Might as well kill a fellow as scare him to death!" said Bill. "I never thought of their doin' that! I don't know how many's left—but my guess is two. Not so many that we can't handle them, anyway. Let's go!"

They crept along among the rocks, well sheltered; clouds had begun to scud across the sky, anyway, and it was a dark, obscure night that made it hard to see anything clearly a hundred yards away. Their objective was fixed now; it was the opening in the rocks through which the boat had come. Here, plainly, was a queer freak of this sandy coast; a natural cave of some sort, probably open to the sea only at low tide. With this seaward side of the cove, of course, Pete wasn't familiar at all; he had had no chance, before, to examine it.

Their ears being attuned to it, they could still hear the low hum of the motorboat's engine as it slipped out to sea. But, as Bill said, some one just coming along wouldn't be at all likely to catch the sound, or heed it; it might easily have been taken for the noise of a car running along the road.

"Needn't worry about them for a while—unless they get chased back," said Bill. "That runner'll stay three miles out—catch those lads taking chances!"

"Where do they come from?" asked Pete.

"Bahamas, probably—Nassau, most likely," said Bill. "That's about as near a place as any. They run some down from Canada, but not much. Easy, now! We're getting close—"

It was tricky going. They were in a foot or more of water most of the time, and there were plenty of sharp rocks about. Half a dozen times Pete stepped on one, and had all he could do to suppress the sharp cry that rose to his lips. But there was one thing about this business; the tension, the excitement of the advance, had, for the time at least, banished the effect of the blow on his head. He had no more pain, and he hadn't had a fit of dizziness since they had come upon the sentry and put him out of action.

They could see the opening now, and paused a moment to study it. Just at first it seemed to them that they were balked. The formation was as queer as Pete had reasoned it must be. Deep water ran in between two overhanging rocks; unless a shelf narrowed the opening there was no way in except by swimming, and Pete didn't like the idea of swimming into that cave—not with the possibility of encountering tricky swirls and eddies. He had a fleeting admiration for the seamanship of the bootleggers; taking a boat in there was something requiring nerve and steadiness. But then, of course, they knew the way—and he and Bill didn't.

"Hold on," said Bill. "There's another way in—must be. They used this tunnel at high tide—and they couldn't have gone in this way then. There's a side door—bound to be. And my guess is it's on the left as we go in. Let's play that first, anyway."

It was blind hunting, but at least they knew, within a few feet, the line upon which the entrance must be found, if at all. And suddenly a low sound of talking stopped them both dead, and set them to listening. They couldn't make out anything that was said, but they had their clue. Bill moved about, groping with his hands; straightened up, at last, triumphantly.

Pete crept over to him, and Bill took his hand and guided it to an iron ring, fastened to a wooden door, such as is used over cellar openings in old-fashioned houses.

"It gives," he whispered. "They're so sure they're safe they didn't even bother to fasten it inside. Boss, this is so easy it sort of scares me."

"Me, too!" Pete agreed. "But we're not out of the woods yet, Bill. I guess we won't have to complain about it's being too easy before we're done!"

EVEN as he spoke the wooden door was pushed up. It threw Pete over backward; as he scrambled up, rising on hands and knees, Bill flung himself upon the man who had come up through the door. They struggled for a moment; from the first, Bill had him. But he couldn't keep him from giving an alarm, and at once there was a sound near by, seemingly from the sand itself, of shouting and running.

"Bet!" Pete shouted—no use being cautious now! "We're here—we're coming after you—"

He heard Elizabeth's voice; then, in the midst of a cry it was silenced. Furiously he plunged down the opening the door had covered; staggered and fell, as he landed, and then was up, flashing his light about. He was in a long passage, roughly timbered, dark as pitch, save for the needle of light he sent prying here and there. He could hear the sound of men running; just too late he caught a glimpse of a dark mass moving away from him and the sea, and toward the house.

At once he gave chase. But he was still thirty feet away when a door was flung shut before him, and he reached it only to be thrown back by the force of his own impact against boards so heavy that he realized at once that there was no chance of smashing them without weapons far heavier than he and Bill could hope to command.

As he stood, baffled, sick at heart, Bill came up, and brought his light, too, into play. He whistled.

"Cheest!" he said. "They sure did sink a lot of work and money on this lay-out, boss! Look there—see? Solid concrete on both sides. And that door's as strong as the ones they used to have on the old gambling houses."

"We've got to get through—we've got to!" Pete cried. "I tell you they took her through—"

"All right—all right, I know it," said Bill. "But when you ain't got strength enough you got to use your bean—get me, boss? Here's where we separate. You take your artillery and beat it for the house, quick as the Lord'll let you—see? I'll stay here and operate as a detached unit—see?

"We're in their secret tunnel—see? And these guys know it—but the ones in the boat don't. They don't know how many of us there are—nor who we are, for sure. For all they know we're revenue men, see, or state police. They got to get word to the boat—that's the only thing they got their minds on now, see? And they got to get a man out through the house to do it. You go choke him off—and don't worry about hurting him, either, if you got to. Only don't shoot if there's any other way. Stick by the door we got in here by as soon as you land the first one they send out—if you do. I'll be inside, dopin' out some diversion."

"Right!" Pete's mind was by no means at par yet, but he could follow Bill's extremely acute thinking—and he could obey orders. He back-tracked along the tunnel, got out into the open, and made his way slowly toward the house. He dared not go inside; they might be anticipating an attempt to force an entrance. And if Bill's guess had been right, if they had only two, or at the most, three men, to deal with, the garrison that the main body of the bootleggers had left behind was distinctly up against it.

It had to warn the men in the boat; it had to keep some sort of watch upon him and Bill; it had to guard Elizabeth—who was, by now, an extremely important hostage. His common sense told him they wouldn't dare to hurt her; that now, thinking their position desperate, they were unlikely to do anything to make it worse. But his common sense had extremely little to do with his feelings; only the need for swift and continuing action kept him from going mad. He knew at last how men feel when they rush into a burning house.

He had to watch the house; it occurred to him that there might be some signal system of lights, intended for use in just such an emergency, which the men in the boat could see. He wished there were; if such lights were shown the boat would head for another landing-place, probably, and he and Bill would have only the men left here to deal with. But the minutes dragged by and no light showed in the house.

He tried to estimate how far the door in the tunnel was from the walls of the house, but couldn't satisfy himself at all; it reminded him of a game he had been wont to play with himself in the New York subway, when he was riding on an express, and would close his eyes, trying to determine just when the train reached each local station. He hadn't opened his eyes at the right spot one time in ten.

Somewhere, he decided, there must be a hiding-place for the liquor they brought in. They must use this spot for storage; obviously it couldn't always be practicable, and it certainly wouldn't always be safe or desirable, to carry off the stuff that was brought ashore at once. It wasn't in the house; that much he was ready to swear. Probably the cache was on the other side of the door that had halted him and Bill, and from that, again, the mysterious entrance into the cellar of his house must open.

He wished that he had had time to follow the tunnel back to the water—but Bill, no doubt, had done that, by this time, and would know all it was necessary to know. He could afford to move about freely in the tunnel; no one could open that door without his knowledge.

Pete, on the other hand, was as firmly fixed in the vantage spot he chose as if he had been chained to a post. He had selected the almost flat top of a small sand hill, where he could hollow out a place and lie himself unseen, and still be sure of seeing any one who might come from the house. As minute after minute passed without the display of any signal it became more and more certain, it seemed to him, that sooner or later a man must try to make his way down to the beach, to warn the boat and its crew as it came back. They knew in the house, of course, when to expect the boat back; no need to send the messenger out too soon.

ONCE in a while Pete took his eyes for a moment from the house and looked seaward. But nothing was to be seen there. Of course the boat would run without lights; moreover, a bank of fog was rolling in. That gave Pete new cause for alarm. If a thick fog came he couldn't be sure, he couldn't even be hopeful, of detecting movement from the house; a man might slip past him, in the sand, within a dozen feet. He could only pray that the fog would come slowly.

He found this waiting damnable. One foot went asleep; then cramps seized upon arms and legs, and he had to wriggle to banish them. He was, all at once, hungry. Then, for the first time since he had regained his senses, he wanted to smoke, and he was drawing a match across the striking surface of a box when he remembered that he dared make no light at all. At once such a craving for tobacco seized him as he had never known before in all his life.

He grew sleepy, too; for the first time he understood how a sentry might go to sleep on post.

Around the house, all at once, a shadow moved. Pete's eyes focused upon it. He stared at it until all about the focal point of his gaze shadows were moving, dancing in weird and rhythmic formations. Yet in spite of all the tricks of optics, all the creeping care of his quarry, he held to the right shadow among them all; was sure, at last, that the moment he had awaited had come. And then he didn't quite know what to do. It had seemed simple—it had seemed ridiculously simple, indeed, when Bill had given him his orders—to stop any one who came from the house. Now it didn't seem simple at all.

He had the enormous advantage of knowing where the other man was, while the latter couldn't possibly know whence an attack might come. But he would know as soon as Pete moved; that was the devil of it.

He did, too; when Pete, afraid to wait

longer, slid down from his hill the other took alarm at once, and straightened up, running toward the water. Even in his haste Pete knew what that must mean—that the boat was near at hand. And that conviction gave him a strength and a speed such as he hadn't known he could achieve. He cut across; just in time he did the one thing the other couldn't have expected: left his feet as cleanly as he had ever done on a football field, and brought his man down with a beautiful flying tackle, his arms locked about the other's legs just below the knees.

His hands moved up instantly to the other's throat; he held him so, in a deadly grip, until his struggles grew faint and ceased and he lay still, on his back, a ghastly object in the faint light, his breathing stertorous.

"Done him in, I guess," said Pete to himself, rising to his knees and staring down. "Gee! I don't care, either! Gosh! Bill and I are committing assorted murders and things wholesale tonight! If the tide comes in that lad we tied up out on the rocks'll drown—and I guess Bill croaked the bird from the tunnel! Oh, well—let 'em come!"

He didn't know what to do next. But a low whistle from the tunnel opening recalled him to Bill's order to stay near there, and he went, quickly.

"Good stuff!" Bill said. "Saw you land him. They must be comin'—what? Probably showed a light, and the ones in the house saw it. Gee—wisht I knew what to do next! If there was some place we could hide by that door in there—but there ain't. Got to stay way back by the water—there's a good hole there."

"There's one thing I just thought of," said Pete. "Did you notice that door, Bill? There's no keyhole in it. They must have some signal—and they can't use this tunnel at all, the way I make it, unless there's some one to open the door the other side. They must fasten it with bolts some way."

"That's right!" said Bill. "Say! We could follow them up and get their signal—"

"Wouldn't do us any good to get in there—not when the whole gang's in!" said Pete. "Hold on—there's some way to use that—but that's not it."

"I know!" said Bill. "I've got the one I beaned when we come in here parked inside—he's just about comin' round, too. Here's what we do. You stay and watch the house, see—where you were. I'll get up a reception committee. I'll lay you money that boat'll turn around after they hear from me—let me have your gun. You're right—we haven't any use for the crowd in the boat no more."

"But I can't see—"

"You will! Shove off—on your way. We don't want to let them get away from the house with the lady, do we?"

"All right."

Pete started. But Bill called him again.

"Listen! They may get started, at that, the way I'm lining this up now. You got the keys for your car—transmission lock—whatever you got—switch—both of them?"

Pete rummaged his pockets; found the keys.

"Good! Then we're all K.O. That car of yours'll catch anything they've got without they get more'n a ten-mile start—and they won't get more'n a hundred yards. May not come to that—but we want to be ready for anything with this outfit. All right—on your way."

Once more Pete had to resume the watchful waiting that had so sorely tried his spirit before. But this time it was easier, and he didn't complain. For one thing, he thought of Elizabeth, and that set him on edge—such a fighting edge as he had never known. For another thing, it couldn't last long, this time. Not unless he and Bill were barking up the wrong tree altogether.

He did wish he knew what Bill meant to do. But one could trust Bill. An efficient lad, that. Too bad he was wasted driving a taxi. But Pete had more respect for taxi drivers than he had had before he got his car.

MERRY hell broke in upon Pete's reflections. There was a sudden hideous spitting clamor of revolver fire, redoubled in volume and effect because it came from the tunnel. Startled cries and oaths sounded; some one in the motorboat abolished the muffler, and the engine joined the infernal chorus. More shots rang out; some one yelled—as a man yells when he is hit, not seriously, but painfully.

Just for a second Pete looked seaward. The motorboat was on its way out, leaving a white wake behind it, rising as it half planed and sent spray flying before it.

"Hey, Bill!" Pete yelled.

In the house a light showed in the living-room for a moment, and then went out.

From the tunnel opening Bill called sharply. Pete raced to him.

"Come on! We got to work quick now!" Bill shouted. "Here's this delegate. Boot him along—quick!"

Pete, to his unfeigned pleasure, suddenly recognized the boy who had stopped him on the road that morning and warned him to go home. He was struggling and cursing now. But Bill tapped him smartly on the back of the head with Pete's pistol.

"You do as you're told!" he said. "You hear me—I'm giving it to you straight! You go to that door and signal them to let you in—or as sure as I'm here you'll be under the sand five minutes from now!"

"You go to hell!" cried the boy, and squirmed again in Pete's grasp.

"You would, would you?" said Pete. A latent savagery in him that he had never suspected was coming to the surface. "Bill here says he'll kill you if you don't do as you're told—and take it from me he will! Me—I'll fix it so you'll be glad of it, too, if you don't come through!"

The next moment, with a swift, sure movement, he had the fisher boy's arm in his hands, and was twisting it, expertly, in that most fiendishly painful of all holds—the hammer lock.

"Ow—ow! Quit! Hey—you'll break my arm! Quit!"

It is easier to face death than to endure some lesser evils, as that misguided youth was discovering. Bill was counting, gun in hand. But he never finished the count.

"Yow—leggo—damn you—I'll knock at the blasted door!"

But Pete wasn't letting go—yet. He relaxed the pressure, but kept the arm in such a position that it could be renewed at once, and he and Bill hustled their prisoner along the passage.

"No tricks—if they don't open right away you get yours!" said Bill.

Arrived at the door Pete still held his grip, lightly but securely. And, with Bill's pistol against his back, the boy knocked. Obviously he was following a prearranged code. Pete and Bill waited, breathless. In a moment the sound of bolts being drawn came to them. The door moved; Bill slipped back a pace and waited.

"Who is it—and what in hell's going on?"

Bill shot forward, as if he had been fired from a gun. With an amazed cry the man on the other side tried to shut the door. But Bill was too quick; he bore him down, and Pete was through after him on the instant. He let the boy go; Bill cursed him for that a moment later, for the boy didn't waste a second, but was off at once, and only laughed derisively as a bullet sang after him.

"Elizabeth!" Pete shouted. He looked around; there was a dim light in the great room in which he found himself. It was full of wooden cases; just as he had guessed, this was the storeroom.

"Pete—oh, Pete—quick!" Elizabeth answered him. At the same moment a man cried out, in furious amazement. Not in the room they were in, though—but just beyond it.

Pete sprang across, with Bill after him. A door was half open; they were just in time to see a man disappearing through a narrow opening in the floor of another passage, like the one they had traversed, but only half a dozen feet long—and with a wooden floor.

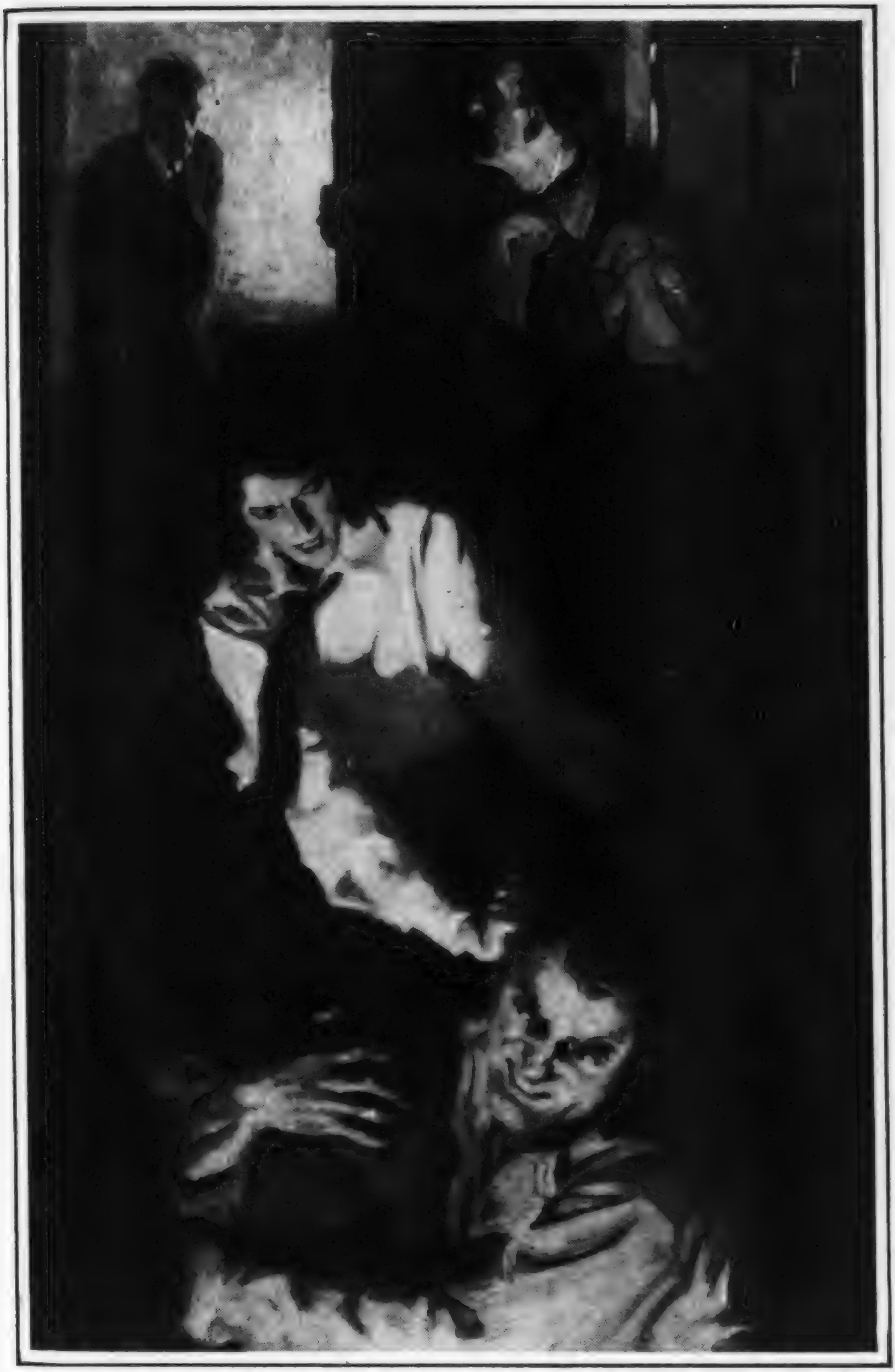
Pete plunged down; ran forward—the only way he could go. Suddenly he stopped. Then instinct made him push upward, and the roof yielded. There were steps before him; he flew up—to find himself in a great round cylinder. Suddenly he cried out. The furnace! There was the secret entrance he hadn't been able to find! Fool—fool!

In a moment he was in the cellar and leaping up the stairs to the kitchen, with Bill after him. In the hall he heard the roar of a starting motor—and another scream from Elizabeth. Even as he got outside he saw a car moving toward the main road.

"HAND over your keys—quick!" Bill snatched them from him; flung himself into Pete's car; cursed as he realized that he had to lose precious time to get out of the barricade the bootleggers' cars made. But when they reached the road a moving dark blur was still in sight before them—to the west. It vanished around a curve, but Bill cried out, gaily.

"All right—they haven't got a chance!" he cried. "I can get seventy outa this boat now."

Not on that road, though! Even Bill had to slow a little, yield precious time to the car ahead, which, relatively at least, could outstrip Pete's car here. But ever



"Pete—oh, Pete—quick!" Elizabeth called. A man cried out, in furious amazement. Not in the room they were in, though—just beyond it.

and again, as they rounded a curve, they saw the black blur; neither car had lights.

Soon, though, as the road widened and grew comparatively straight and smooth, weight and power began to tell, and Bill gained fast. Until, suddenly, the car ahead stopped, when they were so near that they could see two figures leap from it and drag another out, and start, half running, half walking, into the sand hills to the right.

"All right—all right—we got 'em now!" Bill cried. "There isn't enough cover to hide a rabbit!"

He shot the car up to and past the other; together he and Pete sprang out. They might have had trouble in tracking the others, but a shot betrayed them. Bill couldn't fire back, because of Elizabeth—not yet. But he and Pete went for the spot whence the shot had come, and a strangled cry from Elizabeth, cut off halfway, confirmed their direction.

It was over a minute later. Even as they came in sight Elizabeth broke away. One man darted after her; Bill shot the other in the leg and brought him down, and Elizabeth's pursuer, with a cry of fear, gave it up and took to his heels. For a moment Bill hesitated, gun in hand.

"Oh, hell! Let him go!" he said. He approached the man he had shot. "You would have it, buddy," he said.

Bill had, as Pete had always known, great and sound instincts. Anybody would have thought he didn't know there were two such people as Pete and Elizabeth in the world.

"Bet!" As she turned to him Pete opened his arms, and she went straight into them, to be held close. He kissed her—of course he did! There were things to be said and settled, no doubt, but that wasn't one of them.

"Oh, Pete! Pete darling—you're all right? They said you were dead—"

"Dead, hell!" said Pete. "They didn't have sense enough to make that true! Bet—they didn't hurt you?"

"Not a bit! They were rough, sometimes, but not any more than they could help. And one of them jumped all over another one who swore all the time—said that wasn't any way to talk before a lady! Men *are* absurd, Pete—"

"Bill—oh, Bill!" Pete cried. "Come here! Bet, this is Bill, the demon taxi hound I told you about—the one who helped me buy the car! They wrote a part for him in this show—and he didn't like it, so he wrote in his own lines! If it hadn't been for him—"

"Aw, forget it, boss," said Bill. "I got a girl of me own—see? Three kids, too. That's why this is goin' to come in pretty handy."

"Oh, Lord!" said Pete. "Bill, you'll sure get yours for this night's work, old man! But I'm not rich any more—I've blown it all in, one way and another, since I bought the car. So you'll have to wait till I earn some more."

"WAIT, nothin'," said Bill. "Boss, you didn't figure what that stuff totted up to that's back in your cellar, did you? Neither did I; but when we get ours and split fifty-fifty we'll both have enough to buy a meal and some theater tickets!"

"I never thought of that!" said Pete.

"Well, think about it now," said Bill. "Course, if we could hold on and sell it ourselves—but I suppose you wouldn't want to go in the business? No—we'll have to turn it over to the Federal bunch—*after* we've counted it."

"That's the way Bill is," Pete said, proudly, to Elizabeth. "Thinks of everything. Never knew such a man for detail! Bill, I suppose we'd better gather up the bodies, when we get back?"

"You—did you kill any one?" said Elizabeth. "Not but what it was all right, if you had to—"

"Oh, I don't guess so," said Bill cheerfully. "Not unless the guy we tied up out by the rocks drowned. Depends on how fast the tide's come in. I'll have a looksee when I get around to it. Don't you pay no attention to what the boss says, miss. He's the one who pulled this show off; I just done what he told me, like."

"I think you both did well enough not to have to quarrel about proving the other did it all," she said. "You're both very nice, and I'll recommend you to any one who wants a good, complete crime. I—it's ridiculous—but I'm simply starved!"

"Say! I could eat a few myself," said Bill. "Wonder how this bird I shot is?"

He went over to inquire. All right, it seemed. More scared than hurt, Bill reported; entirely willing to take care of himself, too—inclined to be grateful for the chance, even. His wound was in a fleshy part of his leg, and he could walk, after a fashion, as he proved.

Very cheerfully indeed, the three of them piled into Pete's car, and were about to start when Bill remembered the other machine, and decided to drive that back—it was, he said, part of the evidence, and would be confiscated, again to their profit, since they would share equally with the Government. Bill seemed to know a lot about the prohibition law—and to be, perhaps for the first time, warm in his approval of some, at least, of its provisions.

So Pete and Elizabeth drove back together, with Bill leading the way, and Pete drove with one hand, since he kept one arm about Elizabeth, without protest of any sort from her—until, suddenly, he stopped the car with a jerk and took his arm away, and Elizabeth roused herself to stare at him.

"What is it?" she said.

"I just thought—Denny!" he said. "I—I mean—I don't want to—"

"Oh, Denny!" she said. "I'm not engaged to him any more! Pete, do you suppose I'd have let you—if I had been—"

Pete couldn't quite grasp it.

"I—look here—I know you're going to marry me—" he began.

"Yes!" said Elizabeth, in a voice he had never heard before.

"But—" Pete was obstinate, too, sometimes. And he wanted this to be straight.

"Oh, what difference does it make?" she cried. "He called me up the other night—after you went. And rowed. About you—about all sorts of things. So I—well, I couldn't stand it. And I came down here. And here I am," she added, pointedly.

IT TOOK them a long time to reach the house. Bill didn't seem to be surprised, though, and didn't complain about having had to wait.

"That bird didn't drown—the water was only up to his neck," he said. "And I found some ham and eggs and canned corned beef hash and soup and things. And there was a case marked champagne, and I got a couple of bottles here, just so's we can make sure it's the real stuff. I'd hate to have them bulls give us the laugh."

Pete looked at Elizabeth, and she looked at him. Then they both looked at Bill, and laughed, and so did he.

"All right," said Bill. "Beat it, now—into that big room in front, see? I'm cookin', and I don't like folks in the kitchen."

"Can you beat him?" Pete asked. "I ask you!"

They went into the living-room. It was cold and some people might have thought it cheerless. They didn't care. As they looked out of the great windows they could see a faint radiance against the horizon.

"Heavens!" said Elizabeth. "Pete, that must be the sun! It'll be coming up in a minute! Oh, well, I haven't seen a sunrise for years, and I suppose the only way we ever would, would be by staying up all night!"

"I guess so," said Pete. "Bet, I—I can't talk, somehow—but you know how I feel, don't you, sweetheart? About—oh, everything! You—and the house—"

"The dear house!" she said. "But, Pete, we oughtn't to keep it, ought we?"

"Keep it!" said Pete. "I'd like to see any one get it away from us now! Bet, we're darned lucky, the way I figure it! If we'd had to scrape and save to get the money we'd never have had the nerve to buy a place like this. We'd have learned to be careful and stingy while we were saving up, and we'd have bought a house and lot in one of those suburbs where they fix it so that the houses don't all look alike and they have sidewalks and rows of maples. And now—we've got this, and all I have to do is make enough to hang on to it! Pretty soft!"

"But it's so far—my job—because I didn't mean all that—"

He laughed scornfully.

"Job!" he said. "You haven't any job! You've quit. We're going down to Amagansett after breakfast, and find Morgan, and make him show us where they sell the marriage licenses, and Bill shall be best man, and then we'll go back to town and get some clothes and have a party, and—"

She turned and looked at him for a long time. Her face was sober, her eyes almost somber. Then suddenly, gloriously, she laughed, and flung her arms about him.

"We can!" she cried. "We will! Oh, Pete! You can do anything! I know that now! Pete!"

THE END

The Making of an Amateur Detective

The Doctor Disagrees

Jimmy's Clues Lead Toward Unwelcome Conclusions—but Suddenly He Finds Himself in Jail, Suspected of Being Accessory to Murder

By Robert A. Simon

Illustrations by J. M. Clement

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story up to this point is here.

JIMMY WROME was one of a pretty disgruntled crowd of witnesses and newspaper men that made up most of the passenger list of the 2:17 train from Bellechester to New York.

He had some reason for feeling upset. In another car was Claire Barton, the girl he loved: the girl who had, up to a few weeks before, seemed to return his feeling; and—the girl who had then abruptly transferred her interest and, seemingly, her affection, to an insignificant and annoying person called Blake Hesbe, refusing, at the same time, to explain anything to Jimmy or even to talk to him! As a result of which much had happened.

It was the shock of Claire's treatment of him that sent Jimmy, suffering from what he supposed to be indigestion, to consult Dr. Hugh Farrigan. Farrigan, diagnosing his real trouble, prescribed a course of detective stories Jimmy, following orders, had done too well—he had become an amateur Sherlock Holmes and, in the eyes of most of his friends, an infernal nuisance.

Invited by Farrigan to be a guest at Leed Payne's Bellechester place for a week-end, he had been thrown into the midst of the confusion attendant upon that odd millionaire's death—called suicide by every one except Jimmy himself. Jimmy was convinced that murder had been done, and determined to solve the mystery—to find out, among other things, what connection there was, or had been, between Payne and Claire—and of course, Hesbe. Moreover, on a trip to the South completed just in time to enable him to attend the abortive inquiry just held by the local detective, Brinze, Jimmy had come upon a clue—the start of an old scandal which might prove to hold the motive for Payne's murder.

Jimmy had plenty to think about on the train. Moving toward the smoker, he had to pass Claire's seat. She was alone, and she called to him.

"Jimmy!" she said. "I haven't been fair to you."

Uncertainly, he sat down beside her. He didn't know just what to say. Of course she hadn't been fair to him!

"Jimmy," she went on, "I know you think I'm heartless. But there are things that one can't explain. When I asked you not to see me, I didn't mean to be cruel, Jimmy. I've felt terrible about it, and it's been on my mind. I didn't want you to think—"

This incoherent apology had a strange sound to it. There was something else on her mind.

A latent pugnacity suddenly overwhelmed Jimmy.

"Look here!"

He was amazed at the asperity in his

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Claire rose angrily. "I won't answer another question. I don't know why I've let you go as far as you have! Please go!"

voice, but was not at all displeased with it.

"You know as well as I do that you're not much worried about my feelings. If you had been, you wouldn't have acted the way you did. So, young lady, let's set aside apologies and get down, as our friend Brinze so crisply says, to brass tacks."

"I don't know what you mean!"

"They always say 'I don't know what you mean' at this stage."

"Where do they always say it?"

Claire's voice had wonder in it and alarm.

"In detective stories."

"*What* are you talking about?"

"You'll find out!"

"Jimmy," she said, "I really don't know what all of this means. But I want you to be my friend. I'm frightened, Jimmy."

"Of what?"

"Oh, please don't ask me!"

He nodded as though he understood.

"Only—whatever happens—please—be my friend!"

She was sobbing now.

"Of course I'll be your friend," said Jimmy, reassuringly. "But I thought you'd adopted another—and better—friend."

CLAIRE began to weep. Jimmy sat with her for a moment and discovered that he was no longer militant. He couldn't press his questions now. He had gone too far with his assault on her emotions. He left her silently and continued his interrupted journey to the smoking-car.

As he passed into the next car, he encountered Hesbe, apparently returning from the smoker. He couldn't resist the temptation to speak to his detested rival.

"Miss Barton needs you, I think," he remarked caustically.

Hesbe stopped and regarded him sourly.

"What have you been saying to her?" he demanded.

"Nothing of consequence," Jimmy answered lightly.

"Now look here," said Hesbe, his thin voice displaying a tremolo as he tried to sound impressive, "I've been watching you up there with her, and I want to tell you to keep away. I'm not going to have anybody hanging around the woman who's going to be my wife."

The piping announcement crashed into Jimmy's consciousness with terrific force. He was aware that the tow-headed figure shambled away from him with a final gesture, but something seemed to be wrong with his eyes. Finally he clenched his fists and worked his way into the smoking-car, walking unsteadily, as though the ground beneath him were trembling. He discerned Hugh, smoking his familiar pipe, and dropped into the seat beside him.

"You look like a ghost," said Hugh. "What's wrong?"

"Claire's—Claire's engaged to Hesbe," Jimmy gasped.

Hugh put his firm hand on Jimmy's shoulder.

"Don't take it so hard," he counseled. "I know it's a rotten thing to hear, but it happens to almost everybody, and it's all a part of life. A year from now you'll wonder what you saw in her."

Jimmy slumped miserably.

"A year from now!" he cried. "A year from now! I wish to God it was a year from now!"

"Buck up," Hugh went on. "She's gone and you can dismiss her from your mind. It's all for the best. She started you on your wild adventures. She got you into this mystery mess. Forget it all."

"Forget it all!" Jimmy echoed bitterly. "It's not so easy to forget! Hesbe, of all people!"

He brooded and puffed morosely on his cigarette as the train neared the station. Hugh insisted on taking him home in a taxi. Jimmy left him without a word. He entered his apartment and lay on the bed. The bright sunshine disturbed him. He went to lower the shade. A thin figure outside the house made him release the cord, and the shade fluttered up with a crash.

"So he's with us again!" muttered Jimmy.

He watched the seedy man whose face still was hidden by the battered Panama hat. The shadow paced up and down the street, always looking front.

"I wonder whether he's trying to get on my nerves—as though there were room for anything more," Jimmy mumbled. "I wonder—"

There was a note on his desk-pad—"Wicker's." Jimmy crossed it through as he sat at the telephone and ordered a taxi. Then he pulled an old gray overcoat and a worn felt hat from a closet. He put them on and grinned. Then he stuffed an outing cap in his pocket, and answered the ring of the house telephone by hurrying downstairs and into the taxi.

"DRIVE uptown fast," Jimmy instructed the driver, "and I'll tell you where to on the way."

The mystified chauffeur saluted and sped along Broadway. Jimmy removed his overcoat and felt hat and put on his cap.

"We're going to be followed," he told the driver, "but we've got a good start."

He glanced back. The shadow would have to pick up a taxi in the street, and the delay would give Jimmy time to execute his scheme.

"Drop me at the Ninety-sixth Street subway," he went on, handing the man a bill, "and drive right on for a mile or so."

He propped up the coat and hat against the back window of the cab.

"It worked in 'The Rosenbaum Case,'" he ruminated. "Why not now?"

He jumped from the door at the subway station and hurried down the stairs into a downtown express. Whether the shadow followed the taxi or whether he had seen him leave it made little difference now. At least he could go to Wicker's without being followed.

Hough was on duty, and mention of Endle made him communicative.

"Yes, Mr. Endle is one of our best customers," said Hough. "I sold him some mighty fine stick-pins last week. He certainly must be making money."

"He's a very fine saxophone player," remarked Jimmy.

He drew out his watch.

"I was wondering whether you could put my initials on this."

"Surest thing you know."

"What styles of monograms have you?"

Hough produced a card. Jimmy pointed to 7-A, which corresponded with the design on Eddie's instrument and Payne's revolver.

"Is that a popular style?"

"Yes, but not for watches. It's a little big for watches."

"Better for saxophones?"

Hough laughed. "Good for saxophones, loving cups, silverware, and almost anything big enough to carry it."

"I wonder whether it would go well on an old revolver I have home. That is—do people have revolvers engraved?" he asked cautiously.

"Well, not so much. People don't carry guns as much as they used to. But, come to think of it, I had a customer a few weeks ago who had a revolver monogrammed with this very design."

"Really!"

Jimmy was working hard to restrain his curiosity.

"And the funny thing about it was, it was a woman. Some looker, too!"

"A jealous blonde, I suppose?" Jimmy suggested.

"Blonde is right," assented Hough. "Initials were L. P., I remember."

"Did her hair come out under her hat in a sort of band?"

"It certainly did!"

"Claire!" said Jimmy to himself. Yet—he had been sure, before.

He laid his watch on the counter.

"You can put my monogram on this," he said. "'J. W.' I'll call when it's ready."

JIMMY stumbled into the street. Beyond a doubt, Claire was involved in the murder of Leed Payne. The case wasn't complete, but it frightened him. He was about to go home, but he couldn't. He would have to find why Claire had had the revolver monogrammed. And if she really did have a hand in Payne's death—the thoughts bounded maddeningly—what could have been her motive?

"They always do it to save the fine old father's honor," he thought.

The postulate, gathered from the adventures of Bernard Gartlin, irritated him. And yet—there was old man Barton. He had lost money in recent years. Jimmy had met him only once, but he recalled him as a prematurely bowed gentleman, who always looked sad. He had seen better days. Perhaps he had lost his fortune in Payne's offices. The idea was almost too pat, and yet the obvious often was true. Had Payne ruined Barton, and had Claire taken it on herself to avenge him? Too melodramatic. Yet, melodramatic or not, the notion persisted. And if Claire, terrified by her plans, had decided that she must break with all her friends, would that not explain her attitude? It must have been just after the revolver had been monogrammed that she had ordered Jimmy never to try to see her again. But there was Hesbe.

In his bewilderment, Jimmy went to

Hesbe's office. Hesbe did a small brokerage business from a little two-room suite in John Street. Jimmy meant to try to draw from Hesbe further information about Claire's family. If he was going to marry her, Jimmy thought, he ought to know something of the family history.

Hesbe glared at Jimmy as he entered the office.

"I came to apologize," explained Jimmy, humbly. "I've been a little excited lately, and maybe I've said some things I shouldn't have."

Hesbe's pale eyes looked up vacantly.

Jimmy extended his hand.

"I want to apologize," he said, "and I want to congratulate you. Miss Barton's a wonderful girl."

He marveled at the return of his poise.

"Thanks."

Hesbe seemed to have nothing more to say.

"I'm sure her parents are very happy," Jimmy went on smoothly. He assumed a fine air of heartiness. "I suppose you'll be going into business with Mr. Barton now," he remarked.

"He isn't in business," said Hesbe, glad to show superior knowledge.

"Isn't he? I thought he was."

"Not for a long time. Things went wrong and he quit."

"But I had the impression that Mrs. Barton came from a wealthy family."

It was an outrageous bluff, and Jimmy knew it.

"No."

"I thought they came from Boston and owned some big—"

What big thing could they own?

"Some big furniture stores up there," Jimmy finished.

"That's wrong." Hesbe spoke authoritatively. "Mrs. Barton came from Charleston, South Carolina," he explained.

Again the thoughts popped in Jimmy's brain.

"Ah, yes!" he remarked, putting his hands in his pockets to create a nonchalant effect. "The name was something like Nagle, wasn't it?"

He could have brained Hesbe for his deliberation in answering.

"No, it was Nagleby."

"That's right!"

Jimmy almost shouted at Hesbe.

"And they left Charleston about twenty-five years ago?"

He was balancing himself alternately on one foot and the other.

"Yes."

Hesbe was indifferent to Jimmy's increasing excitement.

"Well—good luck, old man!"

Jimmy thrust a perfunctory handshake on Hesbe and scurried to the street.

He became sober, and started slowly for the subway.

"This next interview," he told himself, "isn't going to be quite so easy."

MEMORIES of brief refusals over the telephone and of letters unanswered determined Jimmy's course. He would have to see Claire. The gaudy but neglected lobby of the house didn't deter Jimmy from stepping into the frayed elevator and demanding of the perspiring attendant that he be carried to Barton's corner of the building. "Guests Must Be Announced," proclaimed a dingy card in the elevator, but guests had plied their ways about Cerulean Court for many years with no questions asked. Jimmy rang the bell of 10 E and waited. How many times had he rung this same bell! But the pleasing palpitation which used to preface his entry was gone. There was still a palpitation, but it was scarcely pleasing, and Jimmy couldn't define what it meant.

A rustle from behind the door indicated an answer to his summons. Unwittingly he adjusted his cravat as he used to straighten it in the ages long past—a month ago. And then Claire opened the door.

Jimmy stepped inside silently. Claire's hand lingered on the door-knob, but Jimmy pushed the door shut with his elbow. In the weak, yellow light of the narrow corridor, Claire stared at him. Jimmy regarded her sadly. She was as beautiful as ever, but she looked tired and worn out. Her adventure had marked her.

"I'm not here socially," he said finally. "I have to talk to you. Heaven knows, I don't want to—not about what I have to talk to you about."

"I can't imagine what you want, Jimmy," she replied. "I thought you understood—"

"Oh, that!"

Jimmy laughed impatiently.

"I haven't come to make love to you," he explained, a little surprised by the coldness of his voice. "You asked me not to, and I'm obeying you. This is something much worse."

Claire rubbed her fingers together.

"I really can't see you, Jimmy," she murmured. "Really, I can't. I'm too—too upset."

"I'm upset, too," said Jimmy. "That makes us even. I wish I didn't have to be here tonight. But there's something I must say, and I won't go before I've said it." He stopped. "Anybody home?" he inquired.

"Father and mother are at the movies. I can't see what difference that makes."

"I didn't want anybody to hear what I'm going to ask you."

"Ask me?" Claire looked pale and frightened.

"Yes. Can't we sit down somewhere?"

She sighed despairingly and led Jimmy into the old-fashioned sitting-room. The cheap prints in their haphazard frames seemed to mock him. The last time he had been there—but he resolved to put away memories of the last time. He sank into an armchair with broken springs.

"CLAIRE," he began, "I want to ask you a few questions, not as your friend—at least, I'm not asking you to look on me as a friend if you don't care to—"

"I want to be your friend, Jimmy," she said. "I told you on the train—"

"There were things you didn't tell me on the train!"

The recollection of Hesbe's threats enraged him.

"You didn't tell me you were engaged!"

"To whom?" She asked the question wonderingly.

"Hesbe told me."

"What?"

Jimmy began to walk about the room. He couldn't sit still.

"He told me he was going to marry you."

"He had no right—"

She checked herself suddenly.

"Well, it makes no difference now, I suppose," said Jimmy wearily. "That isn't what I wanted to ask you."

He resumed his uncomfortable seat.

"I want to ask you a few simple questions, not about yourself, but about somebody else. I can't tell you now why I'm asking these questions, but you'll lose nothing by answering them. First, what was your mother's maiden name?"

"Nagleby." Claire's face showed surprise.

"And she came from a little town near Charleston?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Let's say for information. Some day you may cross-examine me as much as you like on this, and I'll answer every question in detail, but please don't try to go behind the returns tonight.

"I don't like to do this, Claire," he went on, almost pleadingly, "I have to. That's all. And you'll understand why before long, I hope. Your father came from the same part of the country?"

"No," Claire replied, her fear apparently subsiding. "He came from Allentown, Pennsylvania, but he met mother while he was visiting in Charleston."

"And they were married in Charleston?"

"Somewhere near there."

"And they lived in Charleston a long time?"

"No. Oh, why did you ask me that?"

"Please trust me."

"I trust you, but—it's so strange that you should come up here suddenly tonight and ask me such peculiar questions."

"They're not peculiar. They're very much to the point."

Jimmy reflected. So Claire's mother had been the woman for love of whom Payne had gone rioting through Charleston on that eventful night twenty-five years ago. And Barton had been the successful rival who had accompanied Payne into the saloon. And it was Barton whom Payne had sworn to break, though it took him the rest of his life. It all dovetailed only too well.

"Is your father in business now?"

"Yes, in a way. He has desk room downtown and he does a little commission business in various lines, but he's practically retired. Father isn't very well."

Jimmy visualized Barton, that unhappy-looking, bent man, whose fringe of black hair encircled a large bald spot like the halo of a vanished splendor. Barton said little, and he shuffled about the house quietly, always as if looking forward to a sleep and a forgetting.

"I'm not asking this next question from curiosity," he continued, "and it's not polite. But please answer it. Wasn't your father rather well-to-do at one time?"

Claire bowed her head. "He lost most of his money," she said softly.

"In Wall Street?"

"He said it went in a venture that didn't turn out well."

"How long ago?"

"About five years ago mother and I noticed that he was acting worried about something. He wouldn't tell us what it was. But one day he said that he'd lost a great deal of money—"

SHE was on the point of tears. Jimmy's admiration for her had never been greater.

"You don't know how I hate to go on," he confessed. "I feel rotten about probing away like this. But try not to worry too much about this question. It's about the last, anyhow.

"Has your father any friends? I mean—does he see many people?"

"No."

"He's something of a recluse?"

"He—he isn't very well."

"I know that. Claire, please forgive me, but I have to know this. This will be the last and most painful one. Do you know of any reason in your father's past why he should have become so quiet and almost frightened in his manner?"

Claire began to sob. Then her emotion changed and she rose angrily.

"I don't know what you mean or what you're driving at!" she cried. "My father's done nothing to be ashamed of. I won't answer another question. I don't know why I've let you go as far as you have! Please go!"

She stamped into the corridor.

Jimmy followed her.

"I didn't intend to insult you," he said; "and I haven't been asking questions to uncover old wounds. I don't suppose I have any right to expect you to understand that, but you will."

"I don't know what's happened to you," she retorted tearfully, "but I'm sure I don't understand. You've been talking like an amateur detective ever since—"

She stopped suddenly, and stood very straight, waiting for Jimmy to go.

"Why don't you say, 'Ever since Payne was murdered?' " he flung at her.

Claire's eyes lost their luster, and she steadied herself against the door.

"Please go," she begged. "I'll break down in a minute if—"

"If I go on?"

His brown eyes were glittering and his jaw had assumed a pugnacious angle.

"Please—please go!"

She was weeping now. There was no anger in her face, only misery. Jimmy felt that he had behaved too severely.

"I don't want to go and have you think I'm a brute," he said.

"It's too late now," she sobbed bitterly.

"Too late for what?"

"Oh, go! Go!"

"But I don't want to go and have you think that I'm your enemy."

"I can't think anything now. Only go, please, and don't—"

" 'Don't ever come again!' " Jimmy finished her sentence mockingly.

She nodded wretchedly.

"I'll go now," he said finally, "but I think I'll see you again. You'll feel differently about things soon. Good night, Claire. Won't you shake hands?"

She disregarded the extended hand.

"Good night," she muttered.

JIMMY sighed as he closed the door behind him. This interview had been a mistake. To be sure, he had learned the identity of Barton, but was it worth while? It established a motive for Claire's connection with the revolver that had ended Payne's life. Perhaps she had shot Payne to protect her father?

The hypothesis seemed painfully logical. There was something in Barton's life which had to be kept hidden. Jimmy had deduced as much from the man's hunted look, and Claire's evasions on the subject were equivalent to confirmation. Payne doubtless knew of this dark spot and was about to bring it to light. The banker had been in a position to know of Barton's ventures in Wall Street. But were they really ventures in Wall Street? Subtract the "s" from "speculations" and the answer was unpleasant but apparently accurate. So many men had described their financial vagaries as unsuccessful investments!

Worse than any possible revelation concerning Barton was the loss of Claire. Detective stories had diverted his mind, had brought him into a new and perplexing set of problems, but neither they nor anything that had followed his study of them had eradicated the thought of Claire. Even in her confused, tearful, angry mood she was the most attractive girl who had come into his life. Love, after all, was a personal equation. One could argue Claire out of one's mind; but when the argument was over, Claire would return insidiously. Why couldn't it have been some other girl?

Jimmy pondered the ways of the cosmic disease as he walked the few blocks from Cerulean Court to his apartment. He should have been figuring out the connection of Claire's confessions with the circumstances surrounding the death of Leed Payne. Gartlin had had a way of shutting himself up with this ratiocination on such occasions and emerging with a neatly worked out set of conclusions. But Gartlin's author hadn't supplied him with emotions which centered on Claire Barton. Jimmy's author had.

As he approached the entrance to the house, Jimmy saw his shadow again.

"This part of it is going to end now!" he announced to himself.

As he started in the direction of the shadow, the shadow walked easily but rapidly up the street. Jimmy followed quickly and suddenly broke into a sprint. The shadow also hurried, but Jimmy's speed was too much for the man. Jimmy came up to him and grasped him by the arm. The shadow had a thin arm, the proper arm for a shadow.

"If you try to get away, I'll turn you over to the police," said Jimmy sharply. "Or I'll beat you up and explain why to the magistrate."

The shadow cringed and tried to hide his face. It was a long thin face, with a foolish little mustache.

"If you don't think I'm on to you," continued Jimmy, "you lose. You can have your choice. Either you can tell me who's engaged you for this little job or you can break the news to one of our sympathetic judges."

THE shadow refused to make any observations. He was edging and sidling and otherwise trying to elude Jimmy's grip. Jimmy applied a hammer-lock and wondered what to do with him.

Gartlin had always had a humorous assistant whose custom it was to bob up when the detective had seized a suspect, bringing an automobile and many waggish profundities. There was no one to aid Jimmy, nor did he know what to do with his captive. He could have found a policeman, but he didn't want the man arrested. He wanted information.

"Come with me," he commanded. "And if you try anything funny, I'll do something even funnier to you. I've been watching your little tours of inspection since they started, and this, I think, is your last one, young man—or old man, or whatever you are."

He applied more pressure and the shadow winced.

"Wait till I really use a little science on you," Jimmy remarked. "Then you'll raise your noble voice in something more than a grunt."

He dragged the man to his apartment house.

"Now, if you'd like to come in quietly and talk this over peacefully, all will be well," he said. "If not, I'll recruit a few fine, upstanding black hall-boys and we'll simply kidnap you."

He punched the man lightly in the ribs.

"Will you come in?"

The shadow grunted assent.

Jimmy relaxed his grip, forgetting Gartlin's maxim that grips never should be relaxed. The shadow deftly wriggled free, and swung an inexpert upper cut at Jimmy's jaw. Jimmy's knowledge of boxing didn't equal his wrestling technique. He swung wildly at the shadow, who whirled about and started to run. Jimmy dived at him, hoping to hurl the man to the ground. The shadow ducked, and Jimmy fell to the ground, clutching something soft and stringy. The shadow, meanwhile, passed out of sight, around the corner.

A little dazed by his sudden descent to the pavement, Jimmy scrambled to his feet, and realized that pursuit would be useless. Angrily he threw the object in his hand to the ground. Then he picked it up again. It was a clue, of course.

The clue proved to be a disheveled false mustache of inferior quality.

"He's certainly like a musical-comedy shadow," mused Jimmy, as he went slowly to his apartment. "Whoever's putting him up to this must be a librettist."

He sat down to a serious contemplation of his booty. It was an everyday bit of theatrical property, totally undistinguished.

"It ought to have the maker's name, address and telephone number on it," Jimmy thought.

But it had nothing on it except traces of spirit gum and dust.

Jimmy placed the trophy in his strong box to join the threatening letter which had warned him against undertaking the search for the murderer.

The adversary who had engaged the shadow had brought Jimmy into a curious harlequinade. It was almost too fantastic to think of a man with a false mustache carrying on espionage in West Ninety-fourth Street, New York City. Yet the mysterious figure, alert and elusive, certainly existed in the flesh. Jimmy decided that at the next encounter he would first knock the shadow cold and then investigate.

There was a letter from Brinze.

"We have been following out certain suggestions which you made to this office," ran this official document, "and we have made some important discoveries by following up your leads. We should like to have a conference with you at your early convenience."

Was this a vindication of Jimmy's theories? He had told Brinze little except that the revolver ought to be looked into. That, undoubtedly, was what Brinze had done. Therefore Brinze was on the trail of Claire.

"Chairchez le femm."

THE false mustache no longer interested Jimmy. Claire was in danger, if Brinze had unearthed the facts about the revolver. Jimmy swore at himself. If he had had any sense, if he had recalled even the elementary rules of the man of a million masks, he would never have handed over a fresh clue to a rival. He didn't care about the credit which Brinze would be certain to preëmpt. Brinze was welcome to all of the glory which might accrue to the solver of the mystery. But Brinze's next move would be to arrest Claire. He had held Gulvin with less provocation.

He was tangling up the affair at every move now. He had led the trail to Claire. It would be simple enough to make out a circumstantial case against her. But, of course, she had been at Shuffle Inn at the hour when the shot was heard in Payne's room. She could establish an alibi.

Jimmy glanced at his watch. It was almost eleven o'clock. Late as it was, he called Brinze—who was sleepy and ungrateful.

"What did you mean by saying that you were working along my lines?" Jimmy inquired.

"Oh—that?"

Brinze's annoying laugh came over the wire.

"You remember your talk about the gun?" he continued. "Well, you were right. We traced that gun."

"Well," said Jimmy. "Where did the man buy the gun?" he asked.

He held his breath as the answer came.

"It wasn't a man, you young sleuth!"

Again the laugh, but this time it pleased Jimmy. He had taken Brinze off his guard.

"Then it was a woman!"

"No, it was a kangaroo."

"And I suppose the kangaroo was Mrs. Gulvin," Jimmy remarked as carelessly as possible.

"That shows how much you know about it!"

Brinze was gloating in high good humor.

"You never even heard of the person who got the permit," he went on. "Just for fun, I'll tell you the name. It was Monica Wells."

Jimmy excitedly knocked a full ash tray from the telephone table.

"What!" he shouted.

"What are you hollering for? I bet you never heard the name before."

Jimmy checked a reply.

"I—don't—think—I—have," he confessed.

"Certainly you haven't! There ain't any such girl! But we know who she was, and I guess you do, too!"

"How should I?"

"How should you? Well, the lady giving her name as Monica Wells is a great beauty, young and slender, with wonderful golden hair, which she wears in a band across her forehead. Now, if you don't know—"

Brinze's laugh brought no joy to Jimmy this time.

"I suppose you had that all doped out, too," concluded Brinze ironically.

"No—I can't say—but are you sure?"

"Sure's anything."

"Will you make an arrest?"

"Not so fast, old sleuth. We know who bought the gun. But that doesn't prove she fired it."

"No, it certainly doesn't."

Jimmy's tone had a wealth of relief in it.

"Well, that's easy enough for you to say. How do you know she didn't?"

"For one thing, she was at Shuffle Inn—"

"Oh, the perfect alibi! Well, I don't blame you for trying to defend so charming a lady, but that sort of thing has ruined plenty of perfectly good professional detectives, not to mention amateurs.

Brinze mustn't suspect Jimmy of any interest in Claire.

"I don't say she didn't," Jimmy added.

"Oh, you don't!" jeered Brinze. "You don't say she did and you don't say she didn't! Maybe you can tell us who did! Are you still so quick at those things?"

"I'm not ready to say anything now. Anyhow, I can't discuss it over the phone."

"Or over anything else," Brinze finished. "I want to see you in a day or two. I want to ask you a few questions about the behavior of certain people at a certain time. Maybe you'll solve everything by then and show us all up for a lot of boobs. Good night!"

As he lay in bed, his deductive processes seemed to be paralyzed. There was a greater problem ahead of him now. He would have to save Claire. And he needed sleep—which wouldn't come.

He reverted to Hugh's formula. His mind went back over the series of books which he had rented from Mecklin's. Suddenly all of them were swept from his thoughts.

"Monica Wells," he murmured. "That's very funny."

Upon that thought he finally did go to sleep.

MECKLIN'S hardly had got under way for the day's business when Jimmy entered. It was a bright, warm morning, and the librarian wondered why her customer had found it necessary to come in on the run at this hour.

"I've saved a new detective story for you, Mr. Wrome," she remarked.

She drew a volume from a little shelf under her desk.

"No, thanks." Jimmy was a trifle abrupt. "I wanted to *buy* a book this morning."

The lady of the olive eyes and the amusing bobbed hair smiled tolerantly.

"Some definite book?" she asked.

"A very definite book. A most definite book. The definite book. *The* book."

Jimmy rattled off his crescendo.

"And what," inquired the mild-voiced librarian, "is this most tangible, concrete and otherwise unmistakable work?"

If this was banter, Jimmy decided, it was charming banter. A delightful girl, in her fresh, white, clinging dress. But there was no time for that, now.

" 'The Porterhouse Murder,' " he said.

"Why, you've read that, Mr. Wrome!" she protested, uncommercially.

"I've read it, and I want to keep it. Not only that, but I want to buy the copy that I read. Or do you keep more than one copy in circulation? If so, I want to buy all of them."

The pouting mouth displayed as much of a grin as a pouting mouth can.

"Only one copy, Mr. Wrome. But that's been pretty well circulated. I can give you a fresh copy."

"No, no—not a fresh copy. The circulated one, by all means."

"It isn't a very presentable copy."

"Please don't apologize for it."

With something that might have been a wink, if the librarian had been any one else, she took down the battered book.

"This is only half-price," she observed. "It's been in circulation so much that we can't sell it as a new book."

"I'll give you double price if you want it!"

"That wouldn't be right." She looked at the shelves thoughtfully. "But as long as you feel a little prodigal this morning, might I suggest another book? It's a novel —not a mystery story—and I happen to know the author. He's such a charming young man that it's rather thrilling to help him along."

"Wrap it up," snapped Jimmy.

Her grateful smile—why so grateful?—made him realize his curtness.

"You must pardon my snappiness," he

said. "I'm a little excited this morning."

"I'm sure I don't mind it," she replied meltingly, "and snappiness is much preferable to lethargy. Don't you think so?" She looked a trifle guilty. "I can have this book autographed for you, if you like," she volunteered. "The author writes captivating inscriptions."

"Certainly. I'll bring it in."

Jimmy paused. There was something refreshing about this girl. She was always cool and pleasant, and her voice had a comforting note in it.

"I'm going to ask you something," he said, "and if you think I'm too presuming, please say so. I don't even know your name—"

"Myrna Quaid," she said. "That's harder to spell than to say, but it really is my name."

"Myrna Quaid," sang its way musically into Jimmy's ear. He liked pretty sounds and he thought that the librarian's name presented a euphonic treat.

"VERY well, Miss Quaid. Before I go on, I ought to tell you something of myself. I'm a bachelor, temporarily on leave from my office, which happens to be with a big sugar-refining house, and I'm doing a little work on the outside. Some day, perhaps, I may be able to tell you what it is. Just now it's in the name of a confidential mission.

"Not to make a novel of a very short story, I've been working rather hard on this job, and I felt the need of a little innocent recreation. Would you consider me fearfully bold, designing and impudent if I asked you whether you would care to dine with me tonight at some reasonably respectable place where there is dancing?"

Miss Quaid fingered a book reflectively.

"Of course, as you say, Mr. Wrome, you didn't even know my name, and we're strangers, and we haven't been properly introduced, and for all I know— But, as you don't look very dangerous, and as your business habits, such as are involved in the returning of books, are above reproach, I think I might risk the adventure."

"And the author of the book which you so delicately sold to me—will he object?"

"Not if I can explain it as persuasively as you can."

"When may I call for you—and where would you like to go?"

"You may call at six, this being a day on which I'm relieved at that hour. Our destination is in your hands, Mr. Wrome."

Jimmy was delighted. Miss Quaid was different from any girl that he had known. She was something new. In her company, he might be able to forget for a while the convolutions of his detective work.

"How about Banquo's? The smart crowd hasn't discovered it yet, and the music's quiet."

Miss Quaid laughed. "Banquo's would be excellent. I'd feel as safe in Banquo's as I would in this store."

"That's a peculiar remark."

"I know it. But it's true."

A customer entered.

"Well—then I'll be here at six," said Jimmy.

He had a feeling that Miss Quaid had bowed him out ever so gracefully, but his little conversation with her had buoyed him up.

Then he remembered the book.

He hurried home and ran quickly through the pages of "The Porterhouse Murder." He marked a few passages, noted the pages on a slip of paper, and carefully relegated the book to the strong box which contained the threatening letter and the false mustache.

With nothing more important at hand, Jimmy dipped into the work of Miss Quaid's friend. It was a book about a young girl who was brought up to imagine herself a great singer and who came to believe it. Some of it puzzled him, but he decided that Miss Quaid was a person of literary taste.

After a close battle with the razor, Jimmy reported at Mecklin's for his evening at Banquo's.

Miss Quaid somehow had gouged enough time out of her working day to be ready in an attractive gray gown. There was a surprise for Jimmy at Banquo's. In the small and colorful dining hall, with its modest dancing space, he heard an orchestra of unusual silkiness. And leading this persuasively harmonious ensemble was Eddie Endle.

Eddie wagged a greeting with his saxophone.

"So you have friends here, too," observed Miss Quaid.

"Why not? Haven't you?"

"Why, yes! My friend is even a more important official."

"Not the author of that novel, is it?"

"Dear me, no! The proprietor and I are on very good terms."

"The proprietor? Do you mean Mr. Banquo?"

She laughed. "The owner of this place is Mr. Mecklin. He runs his bookstores for profit and devotes some of his earnings to art. Hence Banquo's."

"Such being the case, let's dance."

So they danced, and Jimmy discovered in the demure Miss Quaid as artistic an exponent of what passes for the fox-trot as ever he had encountered. She was a delightful companion, a charming partner.

After several blissful sessions on the floor with Miss Quaid, Jimmy found that he wasn't to be her only partner that evening. A smiling, red-haired young man stepped to the table.

"This is Mr. Gumbage," explained Miss Quaid. "He's a poet, and I've managed to force some of his books on innocent customers. But if you don't mind, Mr. Wrome, I'll dance with Mr. Gumbage in spite of that."

JIMMY felt a little lost in this cozy resort, with his partner away. Apparently Eddie noticed his solitude, for he dropped his saxophone, turned over the orchestra to the solemn violinist and sat at Jimmy's table.

"Nice little girl," commented the saxophonist. "First time I've seen you with one, but you sure picked a good one." He paused. "Lookin' a little blue: that guy take her off you?"

"No. I don't know her very well."

"Aha!" Eddie nodded wisely. "That's how those things start," he continued. "I know. I've been there."

Gumbage returned Miss Quaid to Jimmy with a much too pretty bow and retired, uttering thanks. "This is Mr. Endle, Miss Quaid," remarked Jimmy.

Eddie backed away in confusion.

"I got a new tune for you," he said. "It ain't really a new one, but I just fixed it up for the boys and it's goin' fine. I'll have 'em put it on for you."

The orchestra struck up the air immediately, and after some preliminary modulations, the melody became recognizable. Jimmy became agitated as he heard it. His grip on his partner relaxed.

"Anything troubling you, Mr. Wrome?" inquired Miss Quaid solicitously.

"Only memories," sighed Jimmy "It's very good of him to play something for our especial benefit, but I wish that it had been anything else."

"Just a little love, a little kiss;
I would give you all my life for this;
As I hold you fast and bend above you,
Just to hear the little words—'I love you.'"

The melody seared Jimmy.

"Don't worry about me, Miss Quaid," he apologized. "Some tunes are ghost tunes. They bring back—well, never mind."

"I know," assented Miss Quaid.

Redeeming his hat in the cloak room, after Miss Quaid had decided they must go, Jimmy spied a familiar-looking piece of headgear on a peg.

"Do you mind if I look at that big straw hat over there?" he asked the attendant, slipping him a monstrous tip.

"Help yourself," bowed the boy.

There was no doubt about this shabby straw. It belonged to the shadow. But where had the shadow been? Banquo's was so small that one could see all of the diners as one danced around the floor. The shadow hadn't been visible. There were no nooks—where he might hide. The shadow couldn't have been there disguised as a waiter, nor was he one of Endle's ensemble.

Jimmy looked puzzled as he rejoined Miss Quaid in the lobby.

"Something wrong?" she inquired gently.

"No—nothing very wrong. I'm a little bothered by something. It doesn't amount to much, though."

"Can I be of any help?"

He was on the point of telling her of Payne, of Claire, of Brinze, of the shadow, of everything. It would help him to retail the story to one so calm and poised. Yet—Gartlin wouldn't have done it. And even if Gartlin might have, Jimmy wouldn't.

"It'll pass away," he said.

"It isn't digestive, is it?" she bantered. "That would be a reflection on Banquo's, and, in a way, I'm connected with Banquo's."

"Merely indigestible facts," Jimmy remarked. "I can't swallow them, and yet they seem to be in my system."

"How very Russian!" she cried. "You mustn't be a Slav in your thoughts!"

But the shadow's hat hung over Jimmy's head on the way to Miss Quaid's apartment.

"Really, you must cheer up," she remarked at parting. "Come in tomorrow and I'll give you a fearfully gloomy book. Nothing could be as terrible as that book and you'll feel fine afterward."

Books! They had done enough! Jimmy constructed a smile.

"It was so good of you to come with me tonight," he said.

"Don't thank me. I had a better time than you did!"

A lyric good night ended the evening with Miss Quaid.

Jimmy returned home in a taxicab. He looked for the shadow in the street. The shadow apparently had gone to bed.

Jimmy undressed slowly. Miss Quaid occupied his thoughts. What a delightful girl she was! If he had been fancy-free and heart-whole this evening might have been the beginning of something wonderful. But—

"Claire!" he sighed.

Then he snatched off his collar viciously.

"Don't get so damn' sentimental!" he commanded himself.

Clack! Clack!

There was a light patter of footsteps below his window. He looked out. The shadow was back.

Jimmy wondered whether a pail of water might help. No. It was a bit too grotesque.

He looked down undecidedly. The shadow wouldn't be likely to come up and disturb him. If he did, there would be a fine battle! He pulled a gift cane from the closet and laid it near the bed, within reach. He locked the doors carefully and pulled down the dark shades.

"Well, I hope it rains on you or something," he muttered, as he switched out the lights.

After all, dancing is exercise, and Jimmy was a little tired. He went to sleep uneventfully.

MORNING brought a relaxation in the shadow's vigil and a sudden focusing of attention on the Payne case in the newspapers.

Jimmy chuckled as he visualized Brinze facing this broadside. Then he opened his little strong-box thoughtfully and looked over the contents as if to make certain that all were intact.

"I may need you sooner than I thought," he murmured.

It was a warm, sultry morning, and Jimmy's apartment was comparatively cool. He sat by the window with a newspaper in his hand, but he couldn't read. He felt restless. The heat had driven people from the streets and even the traffic on Broadway, dimly visible from the window, was sporadic and listless. Jimmy wanted to go out, but the steaming pavement was a deterrent. He ran through his papers again, studying the accounts of the case. The newspapers knew even less than Brinze.

Something ought to be in these stories. He felt that some element had been lacking in the long columns of print, and he had an uneasy, intuitive idea that he would encounter it before long.

"Gossip in Bellechester says that a woman is involved."

There it was!

Jimmy read quickly, hoping that no names would appear. If Claire's name were mentioned, even remotely, it would stand out before him like a burning headline.

"One of the feminine guests at the house party—"

He tumbled through the rest of it.

No. They hadn't identified the guest. But they would.

Jimmy stared at the paper blankly.

"It looks bad for you, Claire," he muttered. "They can make out a case against you, and I wonder what you'll have to say! If I had a little more dope—only a little more—I could—"

He hesitated as he started down the street, when he finally did go out, and crossed to Hugh's office. The young physician was unoccupied. He was sitting in a swivel chair, wearing as few clothes as possible.

"Seen the papers?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes, I've seen them."

Hugh changed his position to escape a draught.

"Well, I suppose we'll all be in court now," he said, acidly. "And I suppose it's my fault."

Kenworthy swung on Jimmy. "If you want to keep quiet, we'll give you a nice place to keep quiet in," he mocked.

"Yours?"

"I'm afraid so. I told you to read detective stories. They turned you into a sleuth. You imparted your wisdom to a reporter, and now—well, the trail goes back to me."

He switched off the fan.

"Too much, too much," he explained. "As your friend, I suppose I ought to rejoice in the fun you must be getting out of appearing in a mysterious death. As your physician, I recommend a nice, long vacation in the woods."

"Oh, I'm feeling fine!"

"Certainly. I ought to plume myself on effecting this miraculous cure, but I don't. When I was trying to put your psychic machinery back in normal operation, I didn't think that I was putting the police, the newspapers, and an amateur detective to work."

Jimmy laughed and then looked serious.

"There's one thing I wanted to ask you—about Claire."

Hugh lit his pipe and grunted.

"You don't think—she had anything to do with it?"

Hugh laid down his pipe in exasperation.

"I am quite convinced of the lady's innocence," he said mockingly. "Look here," he continued seriously. "You have an unfortunate habit of dramatizing everything. When you came into this office for the first time you pictured yourself as a sort of martyr to love. You were miserable, I grant you. You showed physical effects of your mental sufferings. At the same time, you rather enjoyed the sensation."

"I did not!" Jimmy cried hotly. "I don't know whether you've ever been in love; but if you ever are, and things go with you as they did with me—well, you won't enjoy it. That's all."

"I DIDN'T expect you to admit it," Hugh went on. "If I were a psychologist like my friend Dr. Villmers I would go on and say that you suffer from a light case of egomania. I'm not certain what your variation of the disease is called, but it manifests itself in an extreme desire to be part of a series of spectacular events. Falling in love with a beautiful blonde lady is spectacular. Having a share in a mysterious murder is spectacular—"

"So you admit it was a murder!"

"I don't. Until somebody proves conclusively otherwise, I'll stick to my belief that Payne's death was just what it appeared to be—suicide. I'm discussing your mental attitude now. You believe that Payne was murdered and you fairly revel in the idea of being the sharp young detective who will bring the criminal to justice. Don't you?"

"I don't like your way of putting it."

"Well, perhaps I haven't worded it as gently as I should have. But what I'm getting at is that you're working yourself up into a nervous state again, merely because you can't resist the impulse to jump into exciting events. In this instance, you've even gone so far as to create the events. I mean that. If you hadn't made a few unconsidered statements to a reporter, you wouldn't be worrying now about the guilt or innocence of Miss Barton."

"But I didn't say anything unconsidered," protested Jimmy.

"As I understand it, you said that you knew how the murder was committed and who committed it. Now, that's a fairly striking statement to make, even if you've got the proof in your pocket."

"I *did* know!"

Jimmy stood up and began to pace about.

"I did know and I know still, but—"

"Well, there it is," laughed Hugh. "If you knew then, why didn't you say how Payne was killed and who killed him and finish up the affair?"

Jimmy tossed himself back into his chair in disgust.

"Because it wouldn't have finished up the affair."

He smiled a little shamefacedly.

"In general, I think I'm right, but I've got to get motives and evidence before I can accuse any one. If I told you how this murder was committed, you'd laugh. And if I told you who I thought did it, you'd call me crazy."

"All right." Hugh slouched back lazily. "It's a little warm today," he said. "Don't overtax your mind with mystery. Go home, take off as many clothes as your sense of modesty will permit, and cool off."

"I'm cooler than you think," laughed Jimmy. "The heat doesn't bother me."

"Lucky devil!" grunted Hugh.

Jimmy went then—home, with more papers.

"You was to call a Mr. Brinze," said the doorman. "He phoned twice while you was out."

Ah, yes! Brinze probably didn't feel so elated and confident this morning. The district attorney naturally would have vented his irritation on the local detective, who would now be smarting under the lash. He twirled his hat merrily as he telephoned to Brinze.

"Where've you been all morning?" demanded the detective. "When I don't want you, you ring me up at midnight. When I do want you, you're off at the end of the world."

"Merely across the street."

"Well, cross a few more streets, take the train and come out here as fast as you can."

Jimmy chuckled and Brinze demanded what the noise was.

"Some atmospheric disturbance, I suppose," drawled Jimmy. "Do you really want to see me today?"

"Quit talking and come."

"I thought you knew all you wanted to know."

"I know I don't want any more funny talk from you. Hurry up. That's all."

Brinze was growing into a regulation police official! Perhaps he, too, had been reading detective stories. But his model had been not the Man of a Million Masks but the veteran police captain who said things curtly, sharply and severely.

JIMMY studied more newspaper reports on the way to Bellechester. He was surprised to see his friend Heidelman risen to the dignity of a writer for a New York evening paper—and not only that, but a writer who was permitted to sign his work. A box of black type told the readers that Heidelman had been first on the ground and was in touch with the mystery as no other New York reporter had been.

Whistling a too prevalent ditty, Jimmy drifted into the Bellechester police station and walked down the dark corridor to Brinze's office. He knocked ironically, and a policeman opened the door.

"Well, here's Sherlock!" Brinze's voice blazed like his incandescent cravat.

Jimmy bowed meekly, and hung his hat on a peg. "You know, I never knew it to work, either," he said irrelevantly.

"What to work?" roared Brinze.

Yes, he certainly was the veteran captain today.

"Wax."

"What are you talking about?"

"That mustache you're trying to grow. Mustaches look terrible in the early stages, and smearing wax on them only makes them look worse instead of covering up their youth."

Brinze fingered the untidy growth on his upper lip.

"Shut up!"

The policeman made so poor a job of killing off a laugh that Brinze turned on him angrily.

"Shut up or get out!" he ordered.

The policeman saluted and turned his back.

"I didn't invite you here for an exhibition of your deductive powers, Wrome," snapped Brinze. "Not now, at any rate. In a little while, you may need all you've got—and then some!"

He smiled with impressive grimness.

"Tell Mr. Kenworthy I'm ready for him. And bring in that reporter."

The policeman saluted again and left.

"Is this to be what they call a conference?" asked Jimmy.

He didn't like Brinze's manner, and the dispatch of the Bellechester watch dog for the district attorney and the reporter boded things which he had not anticipated.

"You'll know what to call it when it's over," retorted Brinze. "Just sit down there next to this table and make yourself at home. It'll be your home for some time!"

"Thanks."

"Don't try to get fresh."

The door swung open, and Kenworthy entered, followed by Heidelman. Kenworthy, a tall, tawny-haired individual with a long, cleft chin and soft but penetrating gray eyes, looked over his shell-rimmed glasses.

"So that's the man, eh, Brinze?"

His voice was dry and brisk.

"Come in, Heidelman. Sit down. And if you print a word of this before I say so, you'll be through with a lot of things."

Kenworthy ushered the reporter to a chair on the side of the table opposite Jimmy. He pulled up a chair facing Brinze. Heidelman's face radiated interest and importance. He clasped his hands about his knees and looked on intently.

"You're Wrome, I take it," said Kenworthy. "I'm the district attorney."

"So I gathered," remarked Jimmy.

Kenworthy lit a long cigar, rested his elbows on the arms of the chair, and then decided to take off his coat. He snapped his blue suspenders as he spoke.

"Now, Mr. Wrome," he began slowly, "I don't want to go beating about the bush. I want to get at facts and get at them quickly. So I'm going to ask you some questions and I want answers.

"YOU know this man Heidelman," Kenworthy proceeded. "Now, what did you tell him on the morning following the death of Payne?"

"He told me he knew how it was done and who did it," interrupted Heidelman eagerly.

"I don't want your version of it. I want Mr. Wrome's."

"Mr. Heidelman is correct," said Jimmy.

"In other words, you claimed knowledge of the crime, as we must call it if your statements are accurate, and of its perpetrator?"

Jimmy didn't relish Kenworthy's gaze. Yet men who didn't outstare their questioners always were considered dishonest, and he glared violently at the district attorney as he answered.

"Not for publication."

"Not for publication!" echoed Kenworthy scornfully.

"No. I gave him a hint. That was all."

"A hint!" Kenworthy repeated Jimmy's words with a rising inflection that annoyed Jimmy. He resented being called a liar by a tone of voice. "That certainly was the broadest hint I ever heard of. You knowingly made an accusation of murder and you call it a hint. Very good, Mr. Wrome. Call it a hint, if you will. It's immaterial to me what you call it. What I want to know—"

Kenworthy rose from his chair and snapped his suspenders loudly.

"What I want to know is, who, in your opinion, killed Leed Payne?"

Jimmy felt all kinds of murmurings inside him. He looked blankly at the district attorney, who had shoved his long jaw down almost into his face.

"Answer me!" shouted Kenworthy. "Who killed Leed Payne?"

He swung his lean arms violently against the arm of Jimmy's chair. Jimmy folded his hands tightly. He wouldn't answer Kenworthy. He needn't. When he had any charges to make he would make them in a regular way. He wasn't going to be bullied. And anything that he might say now would involve Claire. He knew that a premature disclosure of his notions would lead to the Barton household.

"Is this an official hearing?" Jimmy heard himself saying.

"That doesn't matter!" shouted Kenworthy. "Answer my question! Who killed Leed Payne?"

"You have no right to ask me that question—assuming that I know the answer," Jimmy said mildly.

"I have every right to demand an answer," Kenworthy yelled.

"You have not!" Jimmy snapped out his assertion boldly.

"If I were on the stand in a regular proceeding," he went on, "you might ask some such question. It would be a little melodramatic, but I don't doubt you'd ask it. This session hasn't any legal ground."

"So you're a lawyer as well as a detective," sneered Kenworthy.

"And if he isn't any better as a lawyer than he is as a detective," remarked Brinze, "he's no lawyer."

Heidelman didn't laugh at this, and Brinze seemed chagrined.

"I don't care if he's a lawyer or a detective or what he is," Kenworthy went on, aggressively. "Now, Wrome, you told this reporter that you knew who killed Payne and how it was done. I want you to tell me right here and now what was back of that."

"The statement wasn't made for publication—"

"You didn't say I couldn't print it," interrupted Heidelman, his journalistic honor touched.

"No," Jimmy admitted. "But I didn't intend it to be printed. As I remember, I asked you not to use my name in connection with the case."

"I didn't!" protested the reporter.

"You certainly told Mr. Brinze," retorted Jimmy.

"That wasn't printing it," demurred the reporter.

"It was worse," said Jimmy.

"Shut up, both of you!" bellowed Kenworthy. "I don't care who told anybody else anything. The point is, you made the statement and I want you to explain it without any more tomfoolery."

"I decline to explain it."

JIMMY'S mouth was drawn in a sharp line and his brown eyes were militant. Earlier, he might have given Kenworthy a few suggestions. Now, he wouldn't offer anything.

Kenworthy turned to Brinze. "Hold this man on suspicion," he ordered. He swung on Jimmy. "If you want to keep quiet, we'll give you a nice place to keep quiet in," he mocked.

"You can't commit me to jail without cause," said Jimmy. "If you do, there'll be a fine political upheaval inside a week."

"Without cause?" Kenworthy raised his eyebrows momentously.

"If you want cause, you'll get it! Brinze, hold this man on suspicion of murdering Leed Payne."

"Don't be silly," Jimmy remarked. "You haven't the slightest ground for holding me. To begin with, I wasn't within several miles of the place when it happened."

"Is that so!" Kenworthy spaced out his ancient sarcasm carefully. "To be frank with you, Wrome, we'd expected you to tell us theories about this case. Now, I suppose it's up to me to tell you some. Have you any proof that Payne was killed at the time that Stelke says he was?"

"Stelke didn't say anything about that."

"He said he heard the shot, summoned the doctor, and when the door was broken in, Payne was found dead. That should be sufficient. But—"

Kenworthy was enjoying himself.

"It's conceivable that the first shot may have had nothing to do with it."

"For all you know," Jimmy said, "there were twenty shots. The point is that Payne was dead when the door was broken in."

"Very good. I only threw that out as a suggestion. Here's something more important. Why did you come tearing over to Olean after Stelke telephoned?"

The real reason would sound foolish. Jimmy couldn't confess that he had scented a mystery and that he wanted to be in on it. Besides, Kenworthy wouldn't believe it. And if Kenworthy really had any suspicions, that would help to confirm them. Jimmy fidgeted.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," he said, weakly.

"So that's the way you feel about it!"

"Anyhow," Jimmy went on, pulling himself together, "Payne was dead when I got there."

"How do you know?" Kenworthy shot at him. "Did you see the body?"

"No, but—"

"When did you hear for the first time that Payne was dead?"

"The next morning—"

Jimmy stopped. It annoyed him to think how he had slept with the mystery he sought almost in the next room and how he had had to hear of it from a country coroner.

"And you knew all about it!" Kenworthy released his clincher triumphantly. "I guess there's enough smoke," he went on. "I don't accuse you of murdering Payne, but you know too damn' much about it to be allowed at large. Brinze, pick out a nice cell and put it at Wrome's disposal."

BRINZE pushed a buzzer and two policemen entered.

"Lock him up," commanded Brinze, glowing in his authority. "And see that nobody talks to him. As for you, Heidelman, one word of this in your paper and we'll settle you so quick you won't know what hit you!"

Jimmy knew that it would be futile to resist. He followed the policemen upstairs to a large corridor. There were many little wooden doors and two compartments with steel gratings at either end of the hall.

"Here are the cells," explained Brinze, who had come up. "Which will you have?"

He giggled, as a policeman clumsily opened one of the steel doors and marched Jimmy in.

Brinze slammed the door. "That'll hold you for a while," he remarked.

Anyway, they can't put him in the chair as an accessory, and it's a relief not to be where he may learn still worse things about the girl he loves, are two thoughts that comfort Jimmy as he waits for the curtain to rise on the final act of his nightmare (see February EVERYBODY'S, out January 15).

Squirrel-Teeth

"Old-Timer," They Called Rabbit Keith at Twenty-five, and He Began to Slip; but Love and an Accident Brought the Jockey Back

By Sam Carson

"RABBIT'S on the rail—and he can't get through. Smother 'im, gang. Ol' Rabbit can't ride."

Thus shouted young Ted Simpson over his shoulder at a field of silk-bloused young gentlemen. Ted was astride a dark brown colt, thundering into the home stretch at Churchill Downs one cloudy autumn afternoon. To his left was a jockey in black and white colors, face grim, trapped by the quick-witted Ted and his fellow riders.

"We got ol' Rabbit!" Ted chanted lustily. "Can't get through."

Down the stretch they swept, hammer and tongs, Ted and Guy Taylor, both earnest apprentices, fighting it out between them, the stands lending vocal support.

When a favorite is beaten, the long-shot plungers are in their glory—the two-dollar kind who bet with that eternal hope that some day luck will come their way. Consequently, with Spurlock pocketed, and Rabbit Keith rendered helpless, there was a roar which contained both delight and prayer. Spurlock was favorite in the Rexford Stakes, a six-furlong purse for two-year-olds.

Ted Simpson it was who shot his mount across the finish line a neck ahead of Guy Taylor's filly. Laughing exultantly at their joke on Rabbit, the youths pulled up below the clubhouse, saluted Rabbit gravely as he swept by, then returned to the judges.

But Edwin Morton wasn't laughing; he owned Spurlock. Furthermore, he had counted confidently upon winning the Rexford. Rabbit Keith had been engaged to ride because there was a dearth of first-rate jockeys at that particular meeting. Morton waited for Rabbit to emerge from the scales room.

"Fine ride you turned in on Spurlock," he observed. "Keep it up and you'll be as good as some of my stable boys."

Rabbit scowled. Morton's sarcasm cut deep; and small wonder. Rabbit wasn't young, as riders go. He was twenty-five, therefore a veteran; for jockeys, like ball-players, are termed old-timers when they really are on the threshold of life. But he was a veteran, wherefore every apprentice and younger jockey yearned most devoutly to humiliate Rabbit Keith. It was cruel; but youth is ever cruel, impatient. And Rabbit Keith was slipping backward, losing his initiative in crises, sullen, perhaps a bit afraid.

They called him Rabbit because two front teeth protruded in such a manner as to raise his upper lip. That, added to his lengthy face and solemn expression, with, of course, the usual bowed legs, didn't make Rabbit very handsome.

"You saw I was pocketed," Rabbit told Morton. "Had to fight 'em every inch of the way."

"Yep." Morton's square face was rather florid. He was an angry man. "I saw 'em. Downright mean! You ought to 've asked 'em to open up and let you have a chance. I'll speak to the stewards.

"Listen, you!" Morton added with emphasis. "I hired you to ride because I thought you'd had enough experience to lick a bunch of kids at their game. Anybody in the world would have known. They had to beat you. Why didn't you keep out in front? Huh? You didn't have the nerve—that's why. Go on." He shook his fist in Rabbit's face. Morton had the look of a stocky bulldog. "You'll never ride for me again."

Rabbit walked up the track thoughtfully, conscious that scores along the rail were laughing at Morton's ultimatum. Ted Simpson, trotting jauntily ahead, was getting applause. Ted was the hero—Ted, who had achieved the impossible astride a horse of mediocre ability. Once Rabbit had exulted in that scattered handclapping, had heard his name mentioned, knew necks were craned for his benefit. But now he was sinking, in the bare fringe of the spotlight which never dropped below the horizon.

"I can beat 'em," Rabbit muttered. "Luck—beginner's luck! And they give me the razz."

Yet Rabbit knew in his heart that he was afraid; he had never been thrown in a race—an unusual thing—and consequently he dreaded an accident the more. Witnessing a spill, with your own mount missing by inches, isn't a very pretty sight. Rabbit had seen more than one white, still face, more than one crumpled body beneath hoofs. He had seen horses swerve, bump suddenly into a crowded field—and then the sight of toppling thoroughbreds, somersaulting figures.

Rabbit could have gone through. There was a bare opening at the head of the stretch, narrow, a temporary passageway between two wavering two-year-olds. With luck he might have guided Spurlock through, to draw away at the finish. But—

Suppose the gap had closed with Spurlock pinioned midway. All three horses would have gone down. A two-year-old isn't steady; it is prone to swerve. Fear of such a spill had robbed Rabbit of decisiveness; and then, within the space of seconds, it was too late. Spurlock was no superhorse; game as the colt was, it couldn't be pulled up entirely, to go around the closely packed field and pass the leaders. But Rabbit had attempted that, and had finished third, a fact which Morton had ignored. But Morton wanted to win.

Silently the jockey changed to street clothes. It was his last ride for the day. Strangely enough, Ted Simpson offered no comment. Others let Rabbit go without bringing up the race. This hurt also, for Rabbit delighted to analyze contests, to pass upon the respective merits of the entries. Once his word would have settled prolonged disputes. But once—

It was the eternal story of man, unwilling to give way for new blood, filled with pathetic eagerness to maintain an ebbing prestige. Rabbit descended the narrow stairway and left by a side gate. He wanted to get clear of the track.

What Rabbit craved was sympathy; he didn't realize that. All he felt was a vague urge to be near people who laughed and joked and treated you cordially. That meant, for the jockey, buxom Mother Crit's place. Not that Mother Crit herself was especially friendly; far from it. Mother Crit was hard-boiled as they make them. She had to be, maintaining an eating-house for racing folks. But Rabbit knew she liked him, respected him. Besides, there was Aileen.

PLACING Aileen would be an extremely hard task; she wasn't any special type. Slim and eighteen, the possessor of deep blue eyes that laughed, of a chin that could be stern when necessary, Aileen managed Mother Crit's dining-room. Mother Crit was her aunt; and incidentally, her only living relative. Not that that mattered much; Aileen wasn't an orphan forlorn. Happy Jack Crittenden, her father, had left her an income.

Mother Crit was getting a bit too heavy to rush from kitchen to dining-room; she found it more pleasant to sit beside the door, presiding over the cash box. So Aileen had gravitated to the job; she liked it, liked dancing in and out between slow-footed waiting girls. Aileen was at once the goal and despair of every child of the stables who ate at Mother Crit's.

There were only a few at the first meal: finicky Ed Petway, the bachelor trainer; bald Tom Eaton, who was fat but not old; and a couple of strangers Rabbit assumed to be with an Eastern stable.

Aileen skipped in, flinging a last retort at some one in the kitchen. "And what will your meat be, Rabbit—beef roast or roast beef? We've got sausage, but I'm not recommending them."

Rabbit flushed; it was a mighty easy thing to do before her. "The roast," he mumbled; but it was unheeded. Aileen was already leaning over jovial Tom Eaton.

"Your young boss is eating here," she announced. "Wants to take me to shows—and the like. What'll I do with him, Tom?"

Eaton chuckled. "What you do to all of 'em, gal. Give 'em the razz and let 'em laugh it off."

"No," she decided. "He looks kind of nice. I'll go—once. Oh! Rabbit's waiting for his roast." She skipped out of the dining-room.

"Live kid," Eaton announced to Mother Crit and Petway. "Belongs in the stake class for sure."

Petway scowled. "I want a clean napkin," he grumbled.

Aileen knew, of course, that Rabbit Keith fairly worshiped her—what daughter of Eve doesn't recognize the symptoms? But Aileen was eighteen, and accepted admiration as her rightful heritage. Because the jockey worshiped from a distance, Aileen was a bit more cordial; and that should have made Rabbit thankful. But it didn't. It made him miserable at times. Rabbit was in love.

It was the larger of the two strangers who spilled the beans. Rising, just as Aileen came up smiling, the sharp-eyed stranger chucked her under the chin.

"Cutie," he asked, "don't yuh get lonesome down here?"

Mother Crit uprose, face grim. Alone, she could have settled matters quite satisfactorily; she could still swing a wicked right. Tom Eaton lost his placid smile. Even crusty Petway slid back his chair quietly. But Rabbit went into action first; the jockey, at first horrified, saw red. This man, still grinning fatuously at the girl, stood six feet high. Wherefore Rabbit gripped his chair firmly.

"You Rabbit!" Mother Crit screamed. "Quit breaking up my chairs. Grab 'im, Tom. Call the police, Ed. Call the ambulance!"

Ted Simpson and a group of friends, hurrying to the second meal, paused in amazement at the doorway. They saw Rabbit gripped firmly by Eaton, a besmeared man at his feet. Near by, Mother Crit was waving her arms expressively. "I paid three dollars for them chairs," she stormed. "All varnished over this spring. And you—you go and break one over a no-good swipe's noggin. What are your fists for? Why didn't you use them?"

Rabbit appeared as amazed as the rest. "I'll pay for the chair," he muttered. "That—that—" He stared dumbly at Aileen.

Surely she would come to his rescue; Rabbit had done it all in her defense. But Aileen tossed her bobbed head.

"Thank you, Mr. Rabbit Keith. But I can take care of myself."

This misjudging of his motives stirred Rabbit. Already Ted was grinning, nudging his companions. He stared at the recumbent figure; it was moving. "Why, he—he—took advantage of you, Aileen."

"Don't Aileen me, you ugly little toad. I hate you! Everybody in South Louisville'll be kidding me by tomorrow." Her eyes were blazing. "Treating me like I was a baby—ugh!" She whirled and ran into the kitchen.

NOW if Aileen had been older, or had undergone some curbing of temper by Mother Crit, she never would have uttered those cutting words. In the first place she didn't mean them; Aileen didn't exactly hate Rabbit. Rather, she was angered by him; for in her vanity the girl assumed she had been placed in a ridiculous light. Tom Eaton realized the injustice of it all. He patted Rabbit's shoulder sympathetically, gazed down at the stranger sourly.

"Had enough?" he inquired. There was no response. "I was just wondering," Eaton reflected, "if you needed a pair of fists to finish up a right good job."

The stranger didn't need any polishing off. He got up hastily, slouched over to Mother Crit's table and paid his bill. Then he hurried away, his handkerchief against a gash just above his right eye.

Eaton looked at the smashed chair ruefully. "How much for that chair?" he asked Mother Crit. "Reckon it's a total loss."

"I'll let it go—this time," Mother Crit relented. "Get out, Rabbit. Somebody might have lost his head and called a cop. Next time wait till you're called on."

Outside, the downcast hero plodded along in the wake of his sturdy companion. Eaton puffed mightily at a slim cigar.

"She—called me a toad," Rabbit muttered, "—an ugly little toad!"

"Huh! Lots o' guys get called names," Eaton replied.

"And she said she hated me," Rabbit persisted.

"Well," Eaton asked, "what of it? Say, you got a heap to learn about women-folks. Aileen's high-strung. She's a thoroughbred, just like Princess Meta, my filly; off like a flash. Always ready to run away."

"But—but—" Rabbit couldn't finish that sentence.

Eaton, shrewder than he looked, turned to stare at the woebegone youth. "Looka here, kid! 'At girl's nobody's fool—nobody's sweetheart. Some day—but not now. I'd forget her."

"I can't." Rabbit was at least truthful. And the yearning of the preceding weeks surged forth. Rabbit just had to talk. "I'm no good, Tom. Losing ground. Today I lost my nerve. Couldn't shoot Spurlock through a gap. Morton's tied a can to me. He'll talk. And I'll be hunting a job around somebody's stable."

"You had some nerve a while ago," Eaton said thoughtfully. "Plenty. All in flash you wrecked a geezer bigger'n I am."

But Rabbit was trembling. "Look at me," he challenged, "—at my mug! Squirrel-teeth—and a rabbit chin. 'At's where I got the name—Rabbit. I know. Folks laugh at me. Kids I helped learn to ride—Ted Simpson—Guy Taylor—running me in a pocket and giving me the razz. Tom, I'm slipping."

Eaton stared at the end of his cigar. "Kid, you can ride for me—any day. All winter, too. Going to New Orleans, an' then, maybe, Tia Juana."

Rabbit shook his head. "Tom, you're the biggest-hearted guy ever lit on a track. Maybe I'll show up on you at New O'leans. I dunno. Gonna beat it from here. She said I was a toad—an ugly little toad. And folks would laugh at her—at her! It's me they'll razz. They'll be calling me Toad from paddock to clubhouse by tomorrow. I know. Guess a guy's got feelings, ain't he? Well, I ain't giving 'em a chance. I'm pulling out tonight somewhere."

They parted as casually as if Rabbit would rejoin Eaton within the hour. That night Rabbit traveled southward, sick at heart. Weeks ahead of the winter race season at New Orleans he had little more than a vague idea of what to do. Perhaps some of the early arrivals out at Jefferson course would need an exercise rider. There were always jobs of a sort, something to kill time and pay board bills.

The something Rabbit found was a place with Toby Walker—Toby of the hawklike nose, pointed beard and shrewd black eyes. Owner, he was, of the most dispirited bunch of platers ever assembled. Toby's specialty was half-mile tracks and outlaw courses, quick clean-ups and quicker get-aways. He welcomed Rabbit's coming.

"Don't ask questions," he told the jockey. "Know you ain't ruled off in Kentucky. So, long's you want, stick around. Pay's light, but grub's good. Stay at Hannah Green's place—nice ol' widow lady. Take you up tonight."

MRS. GREEN was short on boarders, wherefore she appreciated between-season guests. She was the sort who did the welcoming, sighed frequently, knitted constantly and liked to pour her plump self into an ample chair at all times. Hence Rabbit learned, before supper time, that her lamented husband, Josiah, had departed some three years before, that the widow's pudgy fingers could knit with deceptive swiftness, and that Mary, Mrs. Green's daughter, was the cook.

"Mary don't have much time with young folks," Mrs. Green sighed. " 'Pears like she's always too busy. And she's kind of quiet—like me."

Rabbit pictured a slightly thinner edition of Mrs. Green. Mysterious noises from the kitchen subsided. Dishes clattered in the dining-room. And then Mary came to the door.

She wasn't at all like the mother. Mary was a bit plump, not stout, her unpowdered face shining from proximity to steaming dishes. But she looked extremely neat in her gingham apron, steady brown eyes surveying Rabbit questioningly.

"Supper's ready," she announced.

"This is Mr. Keith," Toby said, nodding toward Rabbit. "Helping me out. Believe I smell biscuits."

"You do," she affirmed, "a whole ovenful.

I thought maybe—Mr. Keith might like them as well as you."

Toby chuckled. "Good shot, that. Reckon he's a right peart eater. But he ain't got my capacity."

Rabbit was hungry; he ate in silence, a trifle self-consciously. The jockey was aware of the girl's scrutiny, knew that she was appraising him carefully. Try as he might, Rabbit couldn't keep from comparing her solid, confident movements with Aileen's light-footed dancing steps around Mother Crit's dining hall. Mary was probably a year or so older. Certainly she was an opposite in type. Once, glancing up quickly, Rabbit caught her eyes on him. She averted her face hastily, but Rabbit had caught a look of revolt which was destined to trouble him for days to come. He sensed a kindred spirit. And yet—

There was a tiny mirror across the table; and Rabbit caught a glimpse of his face. The jockey felt a crimson flood sweep over his countenance. Just then the tactless Mrs. Green chose to comment.

"Don't you think Mr. Keith looks a heap like Danny Grewer?" she asked Toby. "Only Danny was hair-lipped. It seemed so unfortunate."

"Mama!" Mary was frowning at her mother.

"Pore Danny!" Mrs. Green continued. "Tried to get in the war. And they wouldn't take him. Married one of Lizzie Mason's girls—Ida, I think. And she up and left him."

"Leave Danny alone." Mary was vigorous in her protest. "He was our friend."

"Why, I didn't say a word!" her mother said plaintively. "Still—"

"Danny was kinda funny," Toby observed. "Reckon he was afore your time, Rabbit. Out West somewheres now, doing right well."

"Still Danny was hard to understand," Mrs. Green insisted. "About Ida, now."

Mary slammed the kitchen door. Thereafter silence reigned, except for Toby's valiant onslaught upon the fast vanishing stock of biscuits. Rabbit felt uncomfortable; at any time Mrs. Green might unlock another flood of reminiscences. But no, she had turned to the ever fascinating subject of her husband's passing. She was going strong when Mary returned; and upon the girl's face was a look of relief.

"Right nice girl, Mary," Toby observed just before retiring. "You oughta cotton to her, Rabbit."

"A girl in a dining-room," Rabbit told him, "was the cause of my showing up here and asking you for a job. I'm off 'em for life. They all want sheiks. And I ain't a sheik. I don't know what I am, but I'm kinda disgusted with myself."

"When a feller's sore at himself," Toby said, "it's a powerful good sign. Watch out for the bird who's satisfied."

Which was small comfort to Rabbit Keith in his present disillusionment. He wanted to be a sheik—a sleek-haired one—so that he could saunter into Mother Crit's place and awe the dazed Aileen into a complete surrender. He pondered so long upon the subject that he dreamed of marching through marble halls, ushered by uniformed flunkies, flanked by pretty girls. And Aileen—there she was, kneeling, anxious, for his recognition.

No, it wasn't a marble hall. Rabbit was astride the finest horse in the wide world, riding down a home stretch with an illimitable vista of stands—roaring thousands. And there was Aileen—waving a handkerchief—urging—screaming—

"Looky here!" Toby was protesting. "You must 've eat something for supper didn't agree with you. Groaning and tossing around—"

And yet, within the week, Rabbit had become part and parcel of the widow Green's household. Evenings were not exciting, just a business of sitting around, Toby reading the papers, Mrs. Green and Mary forever sewing.

Gradually Rabbit took a hand in helping. First it was volunteering his aid when the front gate needed a new hinge. Later he did odd jobs of late afternoons. He did these things shyly because the experience was something new; and it was by way of becoming an adventure in contentment. Then, one night after supper was over, Rabbit walked into the kitchen.

"Thought I might help you clean up," he told the startled Mary. "Old hand at washing dishes."

WITHOUT comment she let him help. Rabbit was pleased because that was the very thing he had expected her to do. They worked in silence until the task was done. Afterward Rabbit took his turn each night. And gradually small talk developed. It wouldn't have been interesting to an outsider, just commonplace little subjects, such as the pattern of Mrs. Green's odd dishes, or Toby's horses. But Rabbit was enjoying himself, began talking about riding again.

"Used to ride at New O'leans regular," he told her one night. "Maybe I will again. I dunno."

Mary quit polishing the stove surface. "What made you stop—riding?" she inquired.

Rabbit flushed, but he decided to tell her the truth. "A girl."

"Oh!" She quit work entirely now. "Did you—quarrel?"

"Wasn't any quarrel," he answered. "I licked a guy for her one night. She didn't seem to like it. She said—well—a plenty."

Mary's eyes were very round. "Hated you for—for taking her part?"

"Guess she didn't want a scarecrow doing her fighting," Rabbit muttered. "She called me a toad."

"Ugh! But it was for her."

The jockey seemed to revel in his self-abasement. "She told me the truth. I'm worse'n a toad—squirrel-teeth—not much to look at. But—well—her telling me got my goat. I didn't stick around."

She bent to her task again. "You must like her—awfully well."

"I hate her," Rabbit replied vehemently. "And some day I'm gonna show her."

"How will you show her?" Mary inquired. "By running away—and quitting riding?"

Rabbit squirmed. "Aw! I ain't going to do this all the time."

"Well," she reflected, hanging up the polishing cloth with unnecessary viciousness, "you have to begin—coming back—sometime.

"I'd like to be in your shoes," she added, "when some giddy flapper calls me names. Spiteful—spoiled! I'll bet your—"

"Aileen," Rabbit supplied.

"I'll bet your Aileen is spoiled. And she's cruel. Maybe she's already forgot about it. And here you are—piddling around—all for her."

That night Rabbit went through his belongings, unearthed a worn, tiny snapshot. It was Aileen, taken the summer before, a photograph Rabbit had obtained through bribery from one of Mother Crit's cooks. Rabbit gazed at the likeness, chin trembling. "I lied," he whispered. "I don't—hate you."

Nevertheless Rabbit could not forget Mary's comment. He formed a vague idea of training intensively for the winter season. And later he began to put his plan into practice. As colder weather overswept the northland, the sight of unloading horse cars became a familiar one.

Rabbit worked like a Trojan to condition Toby's platers. He knew, if the Walker platers could be brought to the barrier and returned winners, he could get plenty of rides. Two more weeks and the winter invasion began in earnest. From new arrivals Rabbit learned that there would be a shortage of riders. Tanforan and Tia Juana were attracting seasoned jockeys. And there was Havana.

ON OPENING day, with Rabbit engaged to ride in two races, he wasn't so confident. There had been a great deal of curiosity as to why he had left Kentucky so hurriedly. Rabbit was thankful that Ted Simpson and Guy Taylor had gone out on the coast. They might have told why. Rabbit was nervous at breakfast time, so much that Toby and Mary wondered.

"You're as fidgety," Toby observed, "as an apprentice about to get his first ride. Feel well?"

That was a suggestion which appealed to Rabbit; if he didn't ride so well, here was an alibi. "I do feel kinda bad," he replied. Then he glanced up and saw Mary's questioning gaze. Those reproving eyes had lighted up lately when Rabbit had returned, hungry and wearied from his work of preparation. "But it don't amount to much," he amended hastily. "Reckon I can shove our horses down the stretch."

But Rabbit didn't shove Toby's platers down—first. His first race couldn't have been better. Rusticana, Toby's seven-year-old gelding, wasn't quite equal to the task. In fact the owner wasn't looking for victory. Rabbit's second race was mediocre. Off to a slow start, he allowed his mount to remain far back—too far—and couldn't get up in the home-stretch run.

A four-year-old mare splashed mud on Rabbit and Toby's entry for the entire distance, splashed them and then went on to finish second.

"Had some bad luck," Rabbit explained to Mary that night as they cleaned the dishes. "Got a jinx."

"I'm not superstitious," she observed. "People aren't jinxed. They jinx themselves."

"Now looky here!" Rabbit said, somewhat incensed. "I done my best. And I gotta ride on Salamar Saturday—fifth race—handicap. I'll show I can make a horse step out."

Mary wiped off the table, unperturbed. "I'm going over to the track Saturday. Mr. Walker's to get me a day badge. Show me what you can do."

Now Rabbit couldn't know that Tom Eaton, out at Tia Juana, had suggested Rabbit to Pritchard, owner of Salamar, to give the jockey a chance. As it was, Rabbit was somewhat dazed by the engagement. So were other silk-bloused youths who cooled their heels in jockey quarters as Rabbit and five other riders went out to the paddock Saturday afternoon. But Rabbit felt the return of ambition. Salamar was worth while, five years old and one of the best handicap horses on the winter circuit.

Out on parade Rabbit caught a glimpse of Mary, cloaked and very demure, standing beside Toby. Both were along the rail, within speaking distance. "Girl's right nifty-looking," he muttered, "when she dolls up."

He was wondering how Aileen would appear as Salamar edged up to the webbing. Distracting, no doubt. If she were down there, in Mary's place, there would be an added attraction for race-goers.

"But she'd call me names if I looked at her," Rabbit reflected. "Easy, horse. I got a hunch we're going to travel in a second."

THEY traveled. Swift as a hound released for the hunt, Salamar leaped forward as the barrier shot skyward. Down the stretch they went, Rabbit exulting because he was out in front. He even risked a glimpse at the stands as they swept by, caught Mary's face, white and strained.

"I'll show you I can ride," he grunted. Rabbit meant that. But he wasn't reckoning with his opposition. A rangy chestnut, Perihelion by name, came up on the back stretch and showed a pair of heels to Salamar. Perihelion was lightly weighted, a fact which contributed to the closeness of the race. For Rabbit, try as he might, couldn't overtake the chestnut colt as they shot around the upper turn and prepared to battle down the home stretch.

Lapped on the speeding leader, Rabbit went for his whip. He was too much concerned with this procedure to notice another horse coming up—from the outside—or that Perihelion was tiring rapidly. Some horses, when winded, swerve badly. Perihelion was that sort. The big chestnut wavered, swung out toward the track center just as Salamar began to respond to Rabbit's whip. That fact, coupled with the desperate rush of the outsider, forced Rabbit into a closing pocket between the two. He recognized the trap too late. Together the three came—and down they toppled, jockeys careening, somersaulting.

Rabbit was attended by the track physician. Outside of bruises, the rider had suffered but one major mishap; his two front teeth—the protruding ones—were lost, buried in the muck of a soft track. Salamar had escaped unscathed. The pistol shot some fifteen minutes later, out behind the stables, was for Perihelion. An ambulance took away the two other jockeys.

"Curtains for me," Rabbit mourned, an hour later, sitting in the anteroom of a dentist. Toby was beside him. "Ain't I a holy sight?"

Toby gazed at the jockey speculatively. "Your upper lip flaps down—sorter. And them skinned places 'll be gone inside of a week. Can't say you're ruint, Rabbit. Let the doc pass on you fust."

Picking that particular dentist at random was most fortunate for Rabbit; graduated but a short time previously, the practitioner yearned to experiment. He regarded Rabbit as a gift from the skies. "You'll be able to stand bridge work by next week," the dentist informed. "But man alive! Why didn't you have those teeth straightened when you were young?"

"I didn't know it could be done," Rabbit explained frankly. "Nobody told me."

"H'm! Your friends won't know you," the dentist promised, "when I get through.

Let's see—mouth a bit wider, please. H'm! I'll fix you up temporarily. Next Friday at ten o'clock."

Outside, Rabbit threw his shoulders back, stepped out briskly. "Hear that, Toby? Did you hear him? Gonna straighten out my face. Hot dog! Lost my rabbit teeth —maybe my chin. Hot dog!"

He had to tell some one else about it; and naturally it was Mary. Telling her things came as a matter of course. "Coupla weeks, sister," he announced, "and I got a new face. 'At's what that fall done for me. Rabbit! They're gonna change my name to Valentino."

At that news Mary lost her sympathetic attitude. Truly Rabbit, as he faced her, face scratched and bruised, an ugly gap showing as he talked, was an object for pity. Instead she smiled, although her chin trembled ever so slightly. "I'm—so glad. But—I was afraid—when you fell."

"Shucks! Best thing ever happened to me. Now I won't be dreading a spill any more. Had one. Kind of makes you shy, but not like it had been. I'm gonna ride from now out. Get that?"

"Are—are you going back—to Kentucky?" Mary asked.

Rabbit paused, stared at Mary, then realized the significance of her query. "Say! You bet I'm gonna hit Kentucky again. Sure! Gonna make 'em sit up. 'At's what. Ail—I'll show her something. Come back king of the saddle, riding 'em coming and going. And when I win an extra big race, I'll drop in at Mother Crit's —all dolled up. An' I'll ask that girl if— if I'm a toad. Squirrel-teeth! Hot dog!"

"You ask her," Mary urged, smiling. "I know, when you go back—she'll treat you differently. Because," she added, "you'll be different."

Then Mary went away—to her room— and cried some. "Why," she demanded of the picture calendar above her bed, "does a spiteful, hateful little somebody always get them? Ugh! I hate her."

ONCE again autumn had come to Kentucky, strewing its brown and golden pigments with the aid of a mellowed sun. Mild but significant of approaching winter, a northwestern breeze flowed across the Ohio and invaded the reaches of Churchill Downs. It was hardly noon, yet thousands were already in the stands, hundreds promenaded terraces and walk-ways. The day was significant; Courante, champion of all Europe, entry of Pierre La Fitte, a gentleman of France, was to race that afternoon. Courante the undefeated, winner of three contests on American soil, was about to make a gallant fight to sweep the boards clean. Once at Saratoga, again at Belmont, then Pimlico, American thoroughbreds had succumbed. So here, in Kentucky, was the last stand for American hopes. The race was to be a special one, at a mile and a quarter, fixed weight at one hundred and twenty-six pounds. Through the process of elimination but two colts were eligible to bear colors against Courante: Phoenix, sturdy and capable of distance running, undefeated chiefly because the horse had been kept away from the track through illness as a two-year old; and Spurlock, the greatest hard-luck victim that ever faced a starter. Edwin Morton's colt had suffered mishap after mishap, before the losing race Rabbit Keith had accounted for; and later it had been much worse.

But drowning persons aren't the only ones who grasp at straws. Spurlock, because of recent development, had been adjudged worthy to do battle against Courante. So three horses were to run that afternoon—race for a king's ransom. And there were many who feared that Courante would find winning ridiculously easy.

A slim young man passed through a track turnstile, purchased a program and followed the crowd, a newspaper tucked beneath his elbow. Neatly dressed, he appeared no different from scores of other young fellows in the fast-growing crowd. As he walked, a shrewd observer would have noticed the young man's legs were bowed; and if he could have examined a bit more closely, he would have seen that the subject had extremely nice, white front teeth, set rather evenly. But no one noticed him, until he turned in toward the paddock and spoke to Guy Taylor on the way to jockey quarters.

"Hear you're gonna ride Phoenix," the young man said, grinning broadly.

Guy paused, stared and then whistled. "For the love of Pete! Rabbit Keith with a false face on! Howsa boy? How'd they ever let you get away from up East? Boy —can't pick up a paper without reading about you. Riding fool!"

Rabbit Keith accepted the proffered hand carelessly. "Couldn't keep me away from the track with this card on. Ted Simpson's got Spurlock, huh? Met Eddie Farnham yet—on Courante?"

"Yeah," Guy replied. "Met Eddie. Cocksure kid, all right. Looks kinda black for us. Say, you oughta be on Spurlock. Used to ride him. Guess you're all sewed up for years ahead, ain'tcha?"

"I'm free-lancing—yet," Rabbit told him. "Got a ten-thousand offer—and commission—next year. Eastern syndicate. Say Eddie's right certain about this race?"

"Nothing else," Guy replied. "And that ain't half of it. 'At combination—Eddie and Courante—is good."

Guy was saying other things, but Rabbit heard vaguely. For there, not twenty feet away, was Mother Crit, buxom as ever, accompanied by Aileen. It wasn't a slim Aileen; she was heavier. But her elfin profile was the same; and sight of it made Rabbit's heart beat faster.

"Huh—whazzat?" he broke in at Guy's question. "Yeah. Swung from New O'leans up to Canada—then East. Yeah. Cleaned up."

They were still talking when Edwin Morton, face pale, trotted into the secretary's office, emerged with that harassed individual.

Rabbit noticed them absently, until they headed in his direction.

"Who's upstairs?" the secretary called to Guy. "Hustle 'em out—quick. Ted Simpson's been half killed in an automobile wreck."

"Gosh!" Guy exclaimed. "Can't ride. Say, Mr. Pearson—say! Looky! Here's Rabbit Keith—no—here—beside me."

"Holy thunder!" Morton stared at his former rider, bewildered. "What's—don't look like Rabbit."

The jockey was unperturbed. "Well," he observed, "it's lil Rabbit just the same. Say Ted's hurt?"

"Yes," Morton explained, "coming out. Just heard. Dunno how bad. But he's in the hospital."

"We've got to get a substitute," the secretary announced, "—or at least Mr. Morton has. Where's Dugan?"

"Don't want Dugan," Morton cut in. "Uh—Rabbit! Can you—will you take Spurlock?"

Rabbit gazed at his former employer coldly. "The last time I rode, you made a monkey outa me—right before everybody—'cause I lost—with Spurlock. Maybe I'm not any better than on that day."

It occurred to Morton by now that nobody else in the world would do, barring Ted Simpson. He reached for his handkerchief, wiped his forehead. "My fault," he said. "All mine, Rabbit. Listen!" he begged. "Forget all that's past. I'll pay you—give you a check this minute. I—"

Rabbit heard this appeal with an odd sensation. There had been more than one thing drawing him back to Kentucky, and Spurlock happened to be one attraction.

"Get this straight, Mr. Morton," Rabbit interrupted. "I ride Spurlock, then. I'm riding him—five thousand if I win—nothing if I don't."

Morton appeared as if he wanted to kiss the jockey. Mere thankfulness couldn't describe his visible emotion.

STRANGELY, before the news was bulletined, thousands knew Rabbit was at Churchill Downs, had been substituted for the injured Ted Simpson. Consequently the jam around the paddock was more pronounced. Rabbit Keith's sensational come-back had been written up scores of times. Likewise the New Orleans accident; for a very wise sporting writer had coupled that incident with Rabbit's climb back to the top of his calling. So when the jockey went into the paddock at the bugle call, for once it wasn't the horses which got all the attention. There were two persons present who interested Rabbit exceedingly. One was Toby Walker, in his Sunday best; Toby had traveled several hundred miles to see the international contest. The other person was Tom Eaton, bald, smiling Tom, exulting because Rabbit had the ride on Spurlock.

The trip from paddock to track, through a narrow lane of packed humanity, was a sort of dream to Rabbit. Eddie Farnham, on Courante, was ahead. Behind, rode Guy Taylor. Somewhere, watching him and Spurlock, was Aileen. Rabbit thought of other days, with slimmer crowds, when he had fought doggedly at a losing game. But this sea of faces didn't represent a critical audience; rather it was the opposite, afraid of Courante, hoping against hope that either Phoenix or Spurlock would be good enough to stave off defeat.

Aileen was there. Rabbit's satisfaction should be supreme. Instead he felt unmoved. Things weren't exactly right yet. He was puzzling over that when they lined up before the starter.

Eddie Farnham grinned at Rabbit; his attitude was that of certain victory. "Frog's gonna beat you," he said from the corner of his mouth. "Just like I told you up at quarters."

"Yeah," Guy retorted, "but you're a mile and a quarter from the judges."

Rabbit didn't answer. He was still wondering why the setting had its drawback. He didn't wonder very long, however, for the webbing went up to the accompaniment of a heaven-rending tumult.

Like a vagrant rush of wind Eddie Farnham shot Courante into the lead, clinging to the rail and urging the horse with whip and feet. It was done so neatly that Guy Taylor and Rabbit, although fully alert, had to trail the French thoroughbred as they swept toward the roaring stands.

"Mile and a quarter," Rabbit muttered, taking a firm grasp on the lines. "It's a long ways. Take your time, horse."

Settled it was, for the time being, that Courante should take the lead in the early racing. And Rabbit, glad for this brief space of relaxation, glanced at the blur of faces extending from the rail to the uppermost reaches of the lengthy stands. Aileen! She was there, a part of that elemental, pagan mob. Aileen was there, but Rabbit wasn't thrilled.

Around the clubhouse turn, slowing perceptibly before commencing that prolonged back-stretch fight, they swept, Phoenix moving up, just the least bit.

"Too soon, Guy," Rabbit muttered. "You're gonna wind 'at colt."

But Guy's move caused Eddie Farnham to let out a wrap. Courante was a front runner; and Monsieur LaFitte had instructed specifically that his thoroughbred must keep the lead, a procedure which had resulted in three victories already on American soil.

Across the infield it appeared that the contest rested between Courante and Phoenix. A furlong up the stretch and Courante was less than a neck ahead, Spurlock two lengths behind. But shouting stablemen hanging over the back-stretch rail saw Rabbit pulling at Spurlock—pulling with double wraps.

"HOP, ol' Rabbit—hop!" a negro swipe yelled. "'At boy's holding Spurlock for the home stretch."

Some fifty thousand persons realized the same intent a few seconds later. For as they swept into the upper turn, Rabbit Keith let out on the lines, leaned forward and began to ride in earnest.

Now, in a three-horse race, there isn't much business of going around the field. But Rabbit, moving up swiftly, realized that he would lose ground if he sent Spurlock around the pair ahead. Courante and Phoenix were running as a team, stride for stride, their riders flourishing whips with all their strength.

There was a tiny gap between Courante and the rail as they rounded into the home stretch, a gap which would vanish quickly enough once straightened out. It was a chance, a ticklish one, a dangerous one if Spurlock should fail to run fast enough. Eddie Farnham was watching Phoenix, else he wouldn't have left any opening. Should he glance back, swerve Courante to the left, Spurlock would have to go around.

"Salamar!" Rabbit exclaimed. Why he said it, he couldn't explain later. But that spill at New Orleans flashed into his mind, that race and its consequences.

It requires something extremely amazing, daring, in horsemanship to hush the voices of thousands when a field is racing down the homestretch. And that is what Rabbit did with Spurlock. It was if a director had lifted his hand and commanded silence. There were Courante and Phoenix racing neck and neck. Then showed a blur, and Spurlock was out in front, hugging the rail. After that discord reigned supreme. Rabbit had come through—and all in a moment was leading, by a half-length—a length.

Men threw away hats, grabbed utter strangers and danced weirdly. Thousands, held beyond the infield flower garden by mounted policemen, disregarded the law and charged in mass formation to the fence. An American horse was coming down the stretch first—a Kentucky horse!

But Courante wasn't done for. Not by a jugful. The French entry responded gamely to Eddie Farnham's urging, set out for

Spurlock. That was the cause of Courante's greatness. The colt could run. But so could Spurlock. Now it was these two that battled their gallant hearts out the last torturous furlong.

Rabbit, with a grim face, and an outthrust chin, no longer was in doubt. "It's just a race," he exulted, "just like any other ol' race." The thought of Salamar came back into his mind—Salamar at New Orleans. And as Rabbit felt his mount plunging with unflagging strength, a length ahead, he looked up, drank in his glorious moment.

" 'At's it!" he exclaimed suddenly. " 'At's it! And I didn't know what was wrong!"

Rabbit had solved the problem. Salamar—New Orleans—Mary Green looking on from the rail. It was Mary he craved to witness this race.

Like released fireworks, high lights of his stay in the Crescent City whirled through the jockey's mind. Mary, silent but suggestive, had goaded him on—on to ride—to come back.

Courante came up with a thundering rush. Rabbit leaned forward even more.

"Spurlock!" he screamed. "One more—jump!"

Out in the infield a man attached an American flag to the flagpole rope, raised it as a band played the Star-Spangled Banner. Courante had failed to make it a clean sweep.

TOM EATON was already at Mother Crit's place when Rabbit, in faultless raiment, entered with Toby Walker.

"Whoop!" Eaton roared. "Bring on that cake, Mother Crit. Trot out your best grub for the best rider in the little old U. S. A. Showed 'em up—he did."

And as the roomful crowded about, eager to pay tribute, Rabbit caught sight of Aileen approaching. She was smiling, not so care-free, but obviously sincere.

The diners melted away, for after all, supper was supper. Mother Crit, exceedingly cordial, wheezed back to her cash box. That left Rabbit facing Aileen. Tom Eaton, although he did not know Toby so well, winked solemnly, whereupon Toby hunted a vacant place at the tables.

"I saw your race," Aileen said, "Mother Crit and I—up in the stands. It was—grand!"

As she talked her eyes searched his face, puzzled. Rabbit's face crimsoned slightly, not from embarrassment, but from the knowledge that his goal was reached. He had shown her. And it was doubly sweet because Rabbit's profile was regular, his teeth as teeth should be. That knowledge lent confidence.

"Aw!" he replied. "It wasn't me—just Spurlock. Left Mr. Morton nearly crying. Think he wanted to make his will out to me."

"I should think he would," Aileen observed. "Folks are saying you're the greatest rider in the country—in the world."

"I'll lose a race some day and they'll bawl me out," Rabbit grinned.

Was that trace of hardness in her face disappointment, disillusion or just the result of experience? Certainly there was a subtle change.

"You've changed awfully," Aileen was saying. "Awfully! Something—"

Now! Here was the moment Rabbit had dreamed of ever since he had begun his riding come-back—from the day of Salamar's spill. Hadn't he rebuilt a career for revenge? All because of Aileen? How easy to ask her that question—if he looked like an ugly little toad?

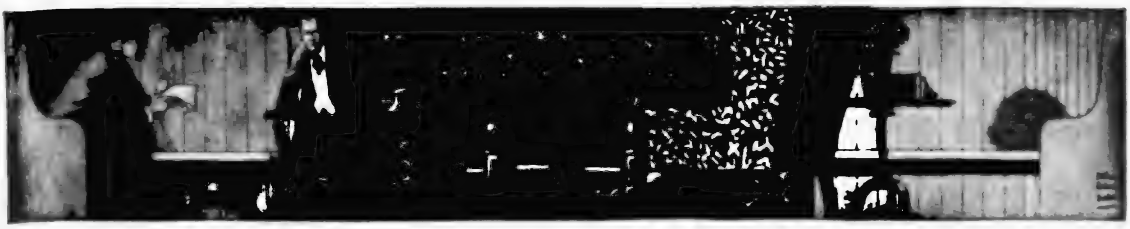
Just to ask her and stroll out magnificently—that would even the score—more than even it.

Rabbit moistened his lips, fumbled with the gorgeous plaid cap he held. All at once he didn't want to ask the girl anything. He wasn't in that mood. It was Aileen who wasn't completely self-possessed. Something had happened—maybe she, too, had lost in the game of hearts.

"Had a tooth-jerker to fix up my teeth," Rabbit explained at length. "Knocked them rabbit ones loose—New O'leans—in a race. Say, guess I'd better find me a seat. Gonna pull outa here tonight. Going to New O'leans," he explained, at the wonder in her eyes. "Somebody—down there—you know—gotta see her." He paused, inspired at a brilliant idea. "Say, I'll do it!"

So there, at one of Mother Crit's tables, while Aileen looked on with an expression akin to sadness—sadness at something not related to Rabbit Keith—the jockey composed his telegram to Mary Green.

It had but two words: "Coming back."



Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

IT IS a peculiar fact that Howard Vincent O'Brien ("The Phantom Caravan," page 9), while writing with unusual insight of the lives of others, has very little to say for himself. Over a year ago there appeared in these columns an autobiographical sketch in which Mr. O'Brien spoke of his adventures in the formative years when, with a miniature printing-press and a half-tone cut of Ralph Waldo Emerson, he made his début in the literary world. His message to the Chimney Corner for this month is in the way of an addendum to the earlier sketch. He writes:

> For the sake of those who might make the dreadful mistake made by some people this summer when they entertained me expensively in the supposition that I had written books about the South Seas, I will do another biography.
>
> I have not written about the South Seas. Neither have I compiled short stories. I am engaged in business, having three children, and write when I can. My business associates think well of me as a writer, and literary critics appear to have nothing but approval for me as a business man.
>
> I am native-born, have gray eyes, am between five and six feet high, use stimulants when I can get them, and play golf. My wife also plays golf, and at ladies' golf tournaments I am introduced as Mrs. O'Brien's husband.
>
> This last is a complete biography in itself—and one that satisfies me.

AN ARMY man all his life, Stephen M. Walmsley naturally writes of people and things more or less martial. In "Reconstruction" (page 91) he draws a picture, not of service days, but of those that immediately follow for a man who bears visible tokens of the war. Of the advantages offered by military service for studying human nature he says:

> It seems to me that there isn't a much better school for story-writing than the army. Some people might disagree with me, for it is a common—almost bromidic—saying that army life is narrow. But it seems to me that there is considerable latitude, geographical and otherwise, between, say, a White House reception and a Spanish Club Ball in Manila, a Muster Ball at the old Menger Hotel in San Antonio and a bedding roll in the mesquite of northern Mexico, a nipa shack in the Philippines and a billet in France. It's not that army life is full of hair-raising adventures and hairbreadth escapes, for it isn't, but because it presents an opportunity for seeing so many different kinds of people under so many different conditions. And people—not adventures—are what make stories. Nor does the army give only a superficial or tourist view of people. Their troubles are your troubles, their lives your lives.

SOME one—and we rather suspect the Bard of Avon—once said, in speaking of the histrionic quality of life, that one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages. Gayne Dexter ("The Star-Maker," page 30) gives us glimpses of four of them, although we doubt if the category is entirely parallel with that of the poet. He writes:

> Scene One. Sydney, Australia. A small boy steals from school to prowl among ships and sailormen, with a preference for dirty island tramps and French tubs running convicts to penal settlements in New Caledonia. Ship-biscuit, bananas and sugar-cane purloined from galley, hold and deck had a fine romantic flavor which persists through later years of scribbling for Sydney newspapers and little rags published west of sunset; of loafing on Narrabeen beach and caricaturing local identities on the walls of the little pub, one drawing, one drink; of penning his way through the islands, sweaty places made majestic and unforgettable by dawns and dusks; of press-agenting movie stars through Australia. Some day he would write real sea stories, he swore.
>
> Scene Two. Indian Ocean. German raider *Emden* pursues S. S. *Persic*. Dark-haired girl from Belfast, London and South Africa rehearses a few

Another international tangle: Persian adventure from the pen of an Alpine yodeler (alias Ellis O. Briggs).

Howard Vincent O'Brien, author of the new serial "The Phantom Caravan" (page 9).

Gayne Dexter ("The Star-Maker," page 30), ex-Australian, presents one specimen of the genus *press agent*.

prayers-for-those-in-peril, but reserves them for the marriage ceremony in Melbourne three years afterward. Husband, now bound to business by reels and reels of film, still vows to outdo Louis Becke.

Scene Three. New York, via Pago Pago and Honolulu. By dint of saying kind words about Charlie Chaplin, Norma and Constance Talmadge, Dick Barthelmess, Jackie Coogan, et al., small boy with South Sea complex has become Director of Advertising and Publicity for Associated First National Pictures, Inc., but rebelling at last roars: "To hell with the movies! I'm going to do what I've always wanted to do—write big thrilling tales of reefs and palms and translucent seas, of the islands where Stevenson left off."

Scene Four. Editorial sanctum, a few months later. Editor hands back big, thrilling tales of reefs and palms and translucent seas. "Dexter," he says, "why don't you write us something of the movies?"

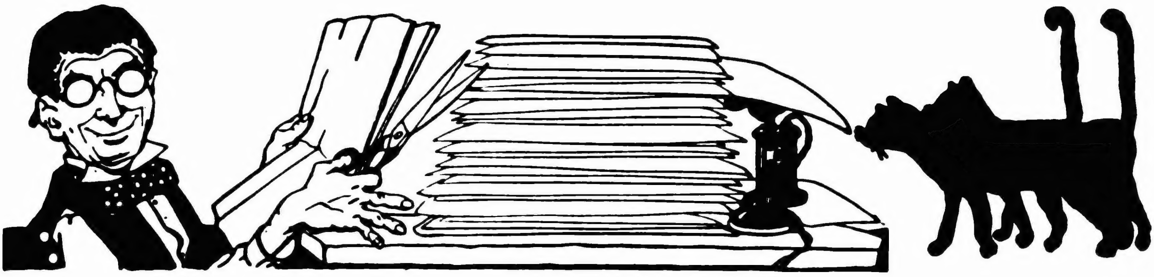
Major Walmsley ("Reconstruction," page 91), finds the army one of the best schools for story-writing.

WE REGRET that insufficient space forbids using both snapshots that we have of Ellis O. Briggs ("The Shah Is Dead: Checkmate," page 43), and equally sorry that the accompanying photograph could not be full length. It would have been illuminating. Of it he says:

In this I appear about to yodel in the Austrian Alps, where I recuperated from the Levant last summer.

Having felt the desire [he continues] to turn myself loose with the written word ever since I was a kid, I believe I owe my present occupation to Professor Lambuth of Dartmouth College. In the long New Hampshire winter evenings he could often be detected crouched over his pipe and pencil explaining wherefore I ought to be shot for this or that paragraph.

Immediately after graduation, I set sail for Europe, where I prowled to Constantinople. There, in the country adjacent, and for many months ensuing, I was engaged in The Uplift. My activities varied all the way from tutoring the sixteen-year-old brother of the Shah of Persia—one Soltan Abdul Medjid Mirza in his family Koran—to teaching geography to the incorrigible son of the ex-Pasha of Smyrna. The former position I held two months, while I tried to show his Highness how to change speeds on his automobile without using the clutch. Since my return to New York I have purchased a new typewriter and am at present engaged in the delightful occupation of recording my Eastern memories in the shape of short stories.



Prose *and* Worse, *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

In Baltimore: "*Joseph C. Judge, Lawyer.*" "*Wm. H. Sawyer, Carpenter.*" "*Isaac H. Moss, Florist & Nurseryman.*" "*Francis Severe, Toy Maker.*" (G. E. H.)
In Newark City: "*E. C. Beetam & Co., Rugs.*" "*Moss & Rocke, Diamonds.*" "*Fix Mfg. Co., Beds.*" (W. B. H.)
In window of Wilson & Co., Indianapolis, jewelers: "*Good Timekeepers while they last, $4.95.*" (W. M. G.)
On a stack of cakes in a Pittsburgh bakery: "*Only three for a nickel.*" (W. M. G.)
In Milltown, Wis.: "*Dr. Funne, Dentist.*" (Lykell, he is.) (MISS V. L.)
In Buffalo: "*Paul Peter and Son.*" (J. M., JR.)
In Ellington, Conn.: "*Miss June Pease.*" (MRS. R. F. B.)

(*Cleveland Plain-Dealer*)

In the rôle of a hysterical serving maid she shoots the poet's brother in the epilogue.

Not always a fatal spot, but often most distressing.

(*Greenwood notes in Sparta, Tenn., Expositor*)

Henry Hollingsworth is some better at this writing.
Mr. Frank Simmons' family are all sick.
Mr. Luther Simmons is some better now.
Little Orville Davis is sick.
Little Misses Gladys and Thelma Lee Savage are real sick.
It seems that news is scarce. ROSE.

Even *that* isn't any too spritely.

(*Shippenburg, Penn., News*)

Miss Caroline Sparrow has gone to Wormleysburg to spend some time with her grandmother.

There's that early bird again.

(*Roosevelt, Minn., Reporter*)

Mrs. Andrew Johnson has twin calves, one a gentleman and the other a nice heifer.

A perfect right, and a peach of a left, sotospeak.

(*Chattanooga Times*)

COLORED man to milk and work around place. 1600 Union Ave.

Some places are worked to death.

(*Ad in Phila. Ledger*)

Two communicating rooms, nicely furnished; private family; suitable for married couple; plenty of hot water.

They're "in it" most of the time, as 'tis.

(*Chicago American*)

Miss Rambeau put Dr. Wolf on the wire. He said: "Miss Rambeau, who has been overworked and laboring under a nervous strain, has been under my care for nine days. The result is that she is now suffering a complete nervous breakdown."

Boy, if that Dr. Wolf calls, tell him I'm *not in!*

(*Chattanooga Times*)

THREE fresh Jersey milch cows can be bought at a bargain on account of sickness. Come and see them today. 213 Sawyer Street.

Hurry, 'cause they might be dead by tomorrow.

(*Michigan City News*)

FOR SALE—Dog weighing 50 lbs., cat (blind) weighing 20 lbs., owner weighing 150 lbs. Whole outfit $9. See Peter Faroh.

Dirt cheap for a complete faroh outfit.

(*Findlay, Ohio, Republican*)

The Misses Mary E. Cherry and Mona Apple and Mrs. Emma E. Jelley returned Monday from an over Sunday visit with a sister of Mrs. Jelley.

Be careful and don't swallow the seeds.

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(Classified ad)

WANTED—Room by gentleman in modern home. Breakfast opinional. Address Sentinel.

"Opinional" means that it must include chicken soup, or be served on the fly.

(Pierre Dakotan)

Every woman who wants to be well dressed and who is proud of her personal appearance should wear the Kayser silk underwear.

They fit very nicely over any tailor-made suit, or even over a fur dolman, and in either case *appear* equally attractive.

(Sign in Bevo Mills, St. Louis)

Music Every Evening
Special To-day
Frogs Legs. Black Bass.

Don't you just love to hear the scales sung by a female bass?

(Battle Creek Enquirer)

Hahn stationed himself at an up-stairs window and waited. Two hours slopped by. Nothing happened.

Boy, get a rain-check for Mr. Hahn.

(Clinton Chronicle)

The Bridge Club met with Mrs. Harry Quiett on the evening of the 29th. Mrs. Wilkinson made the highest score. The prize was a cut-glass guest bedroom drinking set.

Cut-glass guests always add such brilliancy to a party.

(Chicago Tribune)

"This girl Fills Stockings Up."

She has nothing on *my* sweetie.

(Wichita Falls Times)

FOR SALE—A full-blooded cow, giving milk, three tons of hay, a lot of chickens and several stoves.

If treated kindly she might be induced to lay egg coal for the stoves.

(Omaha Bee)

"Drops Dead in Shoe Shop Having Shoes Repaired."

Caught sight of the charge ticket, probably.

(Omaha Bee)

RENT—Restaurant with 5 bedrooms; fixtures $500. A. Gauvain, Minatare.

Where every meal is a real spread.

(Lexington, Ill., Unit-Journal)

WANTED—Respectable woman, 30 to 50 years old, to assist with housework. A good home for the right party. No washings, good wages. Mrs. Sarah Wick.

***Light* work?**

(Clinton, Iowa, Advertiser)

J. B. Bellefuille, who has been a guest at the H. F. Bricker home, has returned to his home in Marshalltown.

He just couldn't eat another bite.

(Chicago Daily News)

SITUATION WANTED—Nursemaid, where honest effort will be appreciated; will not be expected to stoke the furnace or wash the auto.

Much less take in back-stairs to clean.

(Richmond Missourian)

The Banking House of Hughes & Co.—Geo. A. Hughes, Pres.; Newton Hughes, V. P.; Burnett Hughes, Cash'r; C. B. Hughes, Ass't Cash'r. Directors—George A. Hughes, Burnett Hughes, Newton Hughes, C. Hughes, Ami Hughes.

Hughe s hugh in Missou'.

(Ad of Chicago concern)

"BEDROOM SUITES, Adam period."

Lawn pattern with clover trimmings, set off by dandelion ornaments appliquéed; very downy.

(Sioux City News)

Dealers in school books who have been making more than 10 per cent. profit on school books have been notified by the State legal department that they must reduce their prices on school books.

I wonder if they can possibly mean school books?

(Baraboo Republic)

The bride was gowned in a dress of white crêpe and carried a shower bouquet of white roses, while the groom wore the occasional attire.

Meaning, of course, that he put on his coat and collar during the ceremony.

(Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette)

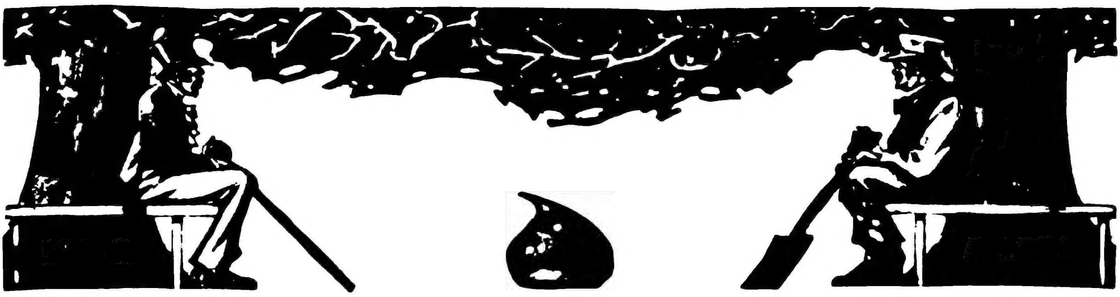
Mrs. Herman Heisler and Mr. Perry Shober have gone to Webster Lake for a few days fishing.

But see what they catch when they get *back!*

(Custer City, Okla., Courier)

FOR SALE—Good Jersey milch cow, giving milk.

Whatjer expect—custard?]



Everybody's Chestnut Tree

Editor's Note: Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.

THE after-dinner speaker had resolved to turn over a new leaf. Never again would he address a bored gathering.

But one day he was approached by a woman who sought to have him speak before her club.

"I can't," he explained firmly. "I have burned my bridges behind me."

"Oh, in that case," she said, "I will lend you a pair of my husband's."

BOBBY, aged six, was playing with a little girl. One of his schoolmates passed by and began to sing: "Bobby's got a girl, Bobby's got a girl!"

"Aw, go on!" retorted Bobby. "You've got one yourself, and she's worser'n mine!"

LITTLE Harry had just returned from his first party. His aunt asked him:

"Harry, did you have a good time and did you dance with the girls?"

"No, Auntie, I didn't dance once, and there were lots of empty girls, too."

THE tired business man was returning from the country club, after nineteen holes of golf. Approaching the end of a concrete bridge, where construction was under way, he collided with a truck. Immediately he climbed out of his car to engage the truck driver in the usual heated argument, but he was unable to find him. Turning to a colored bridge watchman, he inquired where the driver of the truck had gone.

"Boss, dat truck ain't got no driver," was the reply. "It's been parked there for two days."

THE following note was received by a Southern electric light company:

SEPT. The 22, 1924

Dear friend enclose you will fine the amount of $4.90 i am sure this amount do not cover the Bill whicH i due you while under some special occasion i has not Been able to meet those Bill Promp as thay has Been falling due, as you has permitted me a cHance i Do accept your thanks i Do beg you to grant me a little Futher oppertuinty to respond, thank you for your pass favor and also your Favor in advance beg to remain yours truly

LONE WOLF casually dropped into Smoky Pete's quick-lunch emporium and demanded lemon pie. One slice was not enough. The Indian purchased a whole pie, into which he dived with such evidence of enjoyment that the proprietor, as he tickled the cash register, could not resist inquiring:

"Well, chief, how was the pie?"

"Filling heap good, but crust lots tough."

It was not until then that Smoky Pete discovered his paper pie-plate had disappeared.

NONE but the brave deserve the fair—and none but the brave can live with some of them.

"WHAT would you surgeons do," asked a friend of Dr. Cutt, "if everybody learned how to keep well?"

"I'm afraid," replied Dr. Cutt, "that we'd have to suspend operations."

A MAN was spending a night at a hotel in a small Southern town, and when going to his room for the night he told the porter that he wanted to be called early in the morning.

"Say, boss," replied the porter, "I reckon yo' ain't familiar wid dese heah modern inventions. When yo' wants to be called in de mawnin' all yo' has to do is to press de button at de head ob yo' bed. Den we comes up an' calls yo'."

UPTOWN: So Gayleigh's decided to quit flirting? Whatever made him make such a decision?

DOWNTOWN: Oh, he was carrying on with a comely jane who turned out to be a book agent. Had to subscribe for a de luxe edition before he got through.

AN OLD farmer was carrying a pitcher of milk down to the cellar, when he slipped and fell to the bottom, jarring himself from head to foot. His wife called anxiously:

"John, did you break the pitcher?"

"No," replied John, earnestly and profanely, "but darned if I don't!"

"HOW is it that you always let your wife have her own way?"

"I tried to stop her once."

A MAN from the tall timber, visiting the city for the first time, entered a restaurant. Not being able to read the bill of fare, and not desiring to display his ignorance, he told the waiter to bring him a little of everything good.

He was served with soup, celery, crabs, and grape-nuts.

When the waiter brought in a plate of shrimp, the customer strenuously objected.

"Lookie here, man! I done drunk your dishwater, chawed up your boquet, ate your bugs, made the sawdust disappear, but I'll be dawgone if I'm gonna eat them dern grasshoppers!"

"YOU'VE heard what the last witness said," persisted the counsel, "and yet your evidence is to the contrary. Am I to infer that you doubt her veracity?"

The polite young man waved a deprecating hand.

"Not at all," he replied. "I merely wish to make it clear what a liar I am if she's speaking the truth."

KITTY: Did you hear what they're saying about Celeste?

KATTY: Oh, the terrible creature! What is it?

A YOUNG medical student was being quizzed by an instructor. "In what will you specialize?" the aspirant was asked.

"Diseases of the nostril," replied the student.

"Good!" said the professor. "Which nostril?"

EFFIE'S young man had finally said good night, but at the door they found a pouring rain; so the mother invited him to stay. But when the chamber was ready the guest had vanished. They had given him up when the doorbell rang.

There he stood, drenched to the skin, with a parcel under his arm.

"Why—why—" began Effie.

"I just ran home for my nightshirt," was the simple rejoinder.

DORIS was radiant over a recent addition to the family and rushed out to tell a passing neighbor.

"Oh, you don't know what we've got upstairs!"

"What is it?" the neighbor asked.

"A new baby brother," said Doris, and she watched very closely the effect of her announcement.

"You don't say so!" the neighbor exclaimed. "Is he going to stay?"

"I think so," said Doris. "He's got his things off."

"YOUR husband is editor of] the *Clarion*, is he not?" asked a newcomer of Mrs. Dinks.

"Yes."

"And as you have no family, and have considerable leisure on your hands, you assist him now and then in his editorial work, I dare say?"

"Oh, yes!" answered the brisk little woman, hiding her berry-stained fingers under her apron. "I edit nearly all his inside matter."

MRS. X: My dear, I think your daughter recites remarkably well. Don't you?

MRS. Y: Yes. All she needs is a short course in electrocution to finish her off, as you might say.